

Summer Reading

*A dozen tales randomly selected by PDGazette
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A Town Sketch, by Joseph Seamon Cotter
Both Cheeks, by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
The Cut-Glass Bowl, by F. Scott Fitzgerald
Yah! Yah! Yah!, by Jack London
Cully, by Jack Egan
The Bookkeeper's Wife, by Willa Cather
The Romance of an Ugly Policeman, by P. G. Wodehouse
The Lubbeny Kiss, by Louise Rice
Especially Men, by George Randolph Chester
The Devotee, by Rabindranath Tagore
A Ladies' Man, by Robert Carr
The Captured Dream, by Octave Thanet

A Town Sketch

by Joseph Seamon Cotter, from *Negro Tales*
Project Gutenberg EBook #41590

There were about fifteen hundred people in the town of Lockburg. Some five hundred of these were negroes. Nearly every white man owned his home; nearly every negro owed his rent. Nearly every white man had a bank account; nearly every negro, a grocery account. Renfroth, the banker, was an ordinary man of the white race. Jiles Brennen, the smartest negro in a circle of twenty miles, did not know the meaning of interest. White children listened to their parents, read the daily papers, and discussed the signs of the times. Negro children paraded the street, delighted in being out of sight and hearing of their parents, and but few could tell the time of day on the face of a clock. The white teachers were competent and faithful. The one negro teacher had neither legs nor training. The white people returned from church saying: "These points in the sermon fit right into our business ventures. These show our need of moral fiber and the remedy. May they do us good, as the truth always does the meek and far-seeing." The negroes returned from church shouting and praising some "preaching man."

Jiles Brennen and several others were an exception to this rule. Jiles knew most of the white people better than they knew themselves. When he conversed with them he always "talked up." He knew the negroes better than they wanted to know themselves. There was not one who could not repeat a score of "wayside sermons" preached by Jiles. "A rat to its hole, and a negro to his folly," Jiles used to say. "When the last trumpet sounds some negro will be dividing his time between saying 'amen' to a sermon and 'cluck, cluck' to his neighbor's chickens." This remark brought Jiles more than fame. It brought blood.

"If the teacher and preacher of this district were killed and put into a bag, their ghosts would be too lazy to say 'Howdy.'" When the preacher heard this he offered a prayer for Jiles that was intended to remind him of a warm region. When the teacher heard of this remark, he said: "As I have no legs to go after the blackguard, I will let him come to his sense at leisure."

One dark night, as the preacher and others were crawling across a creek on a log someone held up a lantern in front of them.

"Go on," said the rest to the preacher.

"I can't," replied he. "This light blinds me."

"Come on," shouted Jiles, "my light has blinded you before."

The white people took up the remark, and with it fought all Jiles' future battles.

Sickness and death determined negro society in Lockburg. All visited the sick. All attended the funeral. Why should not all attend all other functions? All answered the question for themselves, and attended regularly.

A score of men and women were chatting in Sister Renfro's bedroom when the preacher peeped in at the door and paused long enough to say: "Come out to 'sifting meeting' to-night. Spread the news."

"Will Jiles be there with his lantern?" asked Neal Grafton, a friend of Jiles.

"Never mind about that," answered Sister Renfro. "Say what you please about him, but he's a preaching man."

Sister Renfro's guests soon began to spread the news. Neal Grafton was the most active of all. He stood where he could command four corners.

"Sister Polly," he called to a rather corpulent woman who was passing with a heavy bundle of clothes on her head, "stop a minute--'sifting meeting' to-night!"

"What you say, Brother Grafton? Come here! You knows I can't hear like I used to. I caught cold from shouting at the big meeting five years ago. Who could have kept sober feet? _That_ was a preaching man."

"I say, Sister Polly----"

"Now, stop, son. Let me get in hearing order." After wiping her face with her apron, she said: "Now go on, son."

"Sister Polly, there will be a 'sifting meeting'----"

"Hold, son! The bundle comes down over my ears. Raise it a little. A 'sifting meeting'? Where? Oh! at the church? Raise up the bundle again, son. Now hold it there. Now tell me about it."

"That's all, Sister Polly."

"No! No! It's been five years since we had one. You heard your mother tell about it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but----"

"I know you did; she was there. Sister Renfro was there. I was there. It was a glorious time."

"Yes, Sister Polly, but----"

"My head's just beginning to rest, son. Well, the negroes lied and lied, but one told the truth."

"May I put the bundle on the ground?"

"The clothes are clean, son. I'll head them again soon. That sister told the truth and her head fell. Hold a little longer."

"Oh, my arms, Sister Polly!"

"Hold till I raise up that woman's head. I'll listen afterward."

"After I take the bundle?" "No, son. Hand it here. 'Sifting meeting' at the church? I'll be there."

Sister Polly went on humming, and left Grafton rubbing his arms. He notified a number of others, at a distance.

Polly delivered the clothes and mentioned the "sifting meeting."

"What is such a meeting, Polly?" asked her employer.

"It's a meeting where you tell what you don't know and where people know what you don't tell. If you want more light, come to the meeting. Good-by, I'm in a hurry," answered Polly. Her employer was content to hear from the meeting.

An hour before meeting time Sisters Polly and Renfro were ready. They had spent considerable time arranging their hair. Polly's hair was rolled around a saucer that belonged to her employer. Sister Renfro's was put into the same shape by means of the flounce of an old black dress.

Just then one might have seen forty or fifty people, moving in single file, led by one with a lantern. There were no lights in the town. It was customary for someone with a lantern to come along and gather up the church-goers. The leader to-night was Grafton. Sisters Polly and Renfro joined the procession in the rear. It moved silently on to the end of the little bridge, when Sister Renfro stumped her foot and fell. Sister Polly, in trying to assist her, fell also. Both had to return home, and were late in reaching the meeting. Grafton led the procession into the church.

The church was cold, and fairly well filled with smoke. The sexton was rubbing his eyes. The preacher with closed eyes was tapping his foot and humming a hymn. Grafton suggested that the windows and doors be opened a few minutes, but the preacher demurred, saying that it was too cold. In consequence, the cloud-laden condition of the room was not altered. It is difficult to understand how the congregation remained in that smoky room two hours; but they did so.

The next day Neal Grafton reported the proceedings of the church to Jiles Brennen, and it took Jiles just six months to laugh "sifting meetings" out of the town and the community.

Sisters Polly and Renfro declared the preacher stopped the meeting to keep them from showing their new style of head-dress, and it took him a year to live down the accusation.

"Is your head well?"

"Not quite. Is yours?"

"Well it's doing better than it did after the other 'sifting meeting.'"
These remarks and others of like tone showed the nature of the meeting, and also served to divide the congregation.

And the teacher? He did not count, and never had a wish to.

Both Cheeks

by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, from *Edgewater People*
archive.org

"I think you ought to present that demand note of Uncle Abel's for collection," said James Lord.

His old uncle Zenas sighed heavily.

"I think we have talked that matter over enough, don't you?" he returned.

The square old room in the low light of the gathering night was lovely, lovelier than in broad daylight, when its shabbiness, which was almost sordid, offended. Now soft shadows lay over it, and there were little pools of dim radiance here and there from polished surfaces of old furniture; an engraving over the mantel gleamed out like a sheet of silver, and right across the floor lay a mysterious beam of reflection beyond tracing. James saw that every night before the lamp was lit, and had never been able to trace its source. The glass over the engraving showing silver was simple enough. The street light caused that. The beam across the floor defied him. He gazed at it now as he talked with his uncle. Zenas was his paternal uncle. The Able to who he referred was on his mother's side of the family, Abel Carson. He was a rich old man and Zenas held his demand note, but would not make any effort to collect it.

"No, Uncle Zenas, I don't think we have talked enough until we have talked to some purpose," said James Lord. "If you had that money I could enlist."

"Do you think that is a reason for me to collect?"

Suddenly the boy rose and was across the room. His wiry young figure stood over the old man in the chair.

"Yes, I do," he said, vehemently. "I do, and you ought to think so. You are an old man, Uncle Zenas, but I am ashamed for you. God knows, in time of peace I would be willing to stay here in Leicester and work in the Sylvesters' antique-store till I died, to support you; but this is different. If you had the money which that note represents you would have plenty if the war continued four years, and I could save a little out of my pay for you; but now here I am tied hand and foot. I see all the others going, and I am pinned down here because I am your sole support when you could get enough money to-morrow to set me free."

"You know how I feel about this war," said the old man, and there was a terrible inflexibility in his voice.

"Know how you feel! I should think so! I know to my shame and disgrace, and all the town knows. But I would go, for all that, Uncle Zenas, and I would feel right about going if you had enough money to live on."

"You really mean that you would go to war when you know how I feel about the wickedness of war and how I am convinced that love and peace would take its place?"

"I love peace enough to fight for it," the young voice rang out. "I don't love it enough to stay in a safe place and talk about it while the other fellows are getting hit. Uncle Zenas, for God's sake, why won't you collect that note? Uncle Abel has plenty of money. He is just laughing in his sleeve because you don't."

"I have never had any quarrel with your uncle Able," said the old voice, inexorably.

"And you won't try to collect because Uncle Abel has such a devilish temper and hates to pay out money like poison."

"I cannot have a quarrel, James."

"Uncle Zenas —"

The old man said nothing.

"Look here, Uncle Zenas, could you get on with what I could save from my pay if I did enlist? Have you got anything besides that note?"

The old man was silent.

"Is this house mortgaged?"

There was no reply.

"You could mortgage the house and set me free," said the young voice, with a burst of courage.

"Mortgage the house where your grandfather was born!"

"Well, I suppose that would come sort of hard for you, but I would pay it as soon as I could after the war."

"Young men often never return from war, and often when they do return it is to be burdens rather than agents to remove them. You can't guarantee anything when you go to war — you know that, James Lord."

"Uncle Zenas, haven't you anything besides?"

Then the old man spoke with cold fury:

"If I had a million in bank-notes here this minute I would put it in the fire and make you stay at home and support me. You shall not go to war, James Lord!"

"Uncle Zenas, if you were young and able-bodied, do you mean to say you would not go?"

"I would not! I would settle the whole peaceably."

"No man can settle matters peaceably when there is no peace."

The boy's voice rang high, then he hushed suddenly. He struck a match and lit the lamp on the table and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Zenas.

"Over to the Sylvesters'. I see Thomas Dodd coming in here, and I don't want to stay and hear the old argument, when I am on Dodd's side and can't say so because you are my uncle. I don't like Dodd, either."

James went out of the room, and at the same time the knocker clanged and a dog barked. The dog barked with a volley of shrill yelps.

Zenas rose and went to the front door. A large stout man stood there and a fox-terrier was snapping at his heels. The large man kicked out at the dog, but did not hit him, and entered.

"Why in the name of common sense don't you tell Sam Buzzy to keep that nasty little cur of his at home?" he demanded. "He always hangs round your door, don't he?"

"I think he does a good deal," admitted Zenas.

"Why don't you tell Buzzy to tie him up?"

"I like to live on good terms with my neighbors."

"Oh, my Lord!" snarled the stout man. "And so you let your friends take chances of being bitten by mad dogs rather than have a row with a neighbor!" The man seated himself and the chair creaked. "This old relic won't let me down with a broken bone, will it?" he growled.

"I think it is fairly strong."

"It isn't as if you had steam heat. Steam heat is the very dickens for old furniture. You ought to have it, though. Only thing for a house as big as this. Hot-air furnace don't begin to heat it."

"It does, except when the wind is in certain directions."

"Strange the wind ain't as accommodating as you peace folks. Sort of queer nature seems to go on such strikes."

Zenas flushed. He was a handsome, small old man, with delicate but strong features and a small, closely set mouth.

"When are you going to start your peace delegation?" said the other. His voice hissed with aggravation.

Zenas said nothing.

"Ain't you going to send a peace delegation to Europe pretty soon?" demanded Thomas Dodd.

Zenas spoke sharply.

"Would to God I could do that very thing and stop this frightful slaughter!" said he.

"H'm! Suppose you think a peace delegation, with the women wearing stuffed doves on their hats, and the men with olive sprigs in their buttonholes, and the whole lot preaching and praying, could do more than the armies of the Allies and the United States, now we are in it. H'm!"

"I certainly do," said Zenas, firmly.

The argument was on.

Thomas rose and towered over Zenas ponderously. He shook the index finger of his right hand in his face:

"You believe that right against Scripture?"

Zenas looked at Thomas and his small face seemed as hard as flint.

"I think that is Scripture."

"What do you make of this saying from the Gospel, 'I came not to send peace, but a sword'? What do you think of that, eh?"

Zenas spoke with tense firmness:

"'If any man strike you on one cheek I say unto you turn the other also.'"

Thomas Dodd openly sneered. "If I were you I would quote Scripture correctly," said he. Then he fairly shouted, "But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"The meaning is the same," returned Zenas, firmly.

"You know what is said if anybody changes just one word in the Bible, I suppose," sneered Thomas Dodd.

Zenas did not answer. He was a gentleman, and Dodd lacked some of the traits of one. That gave Zenas a certain dignity.

Thomas dimly recognized the fact. His great face blazed red. He shook his finger in the other man's face.

"You traitor, you!" he shouted. "That's what you are, a damn traitor!"

"If believing in saving the sons of my country from quarrel and bloodshed is treachery, then I am a traitor," replied Zenas.

He gazed straight at the index finger, which nearly touched his delicate nose. Zenas looked more high-bred than usual in contrast with Thomas Dodd. His face did not flush. It was slightly paler and his features stood out more distinctly.

"Damn traitor!" said Thomas Dodd.

Zenas said nothing.

"You really mean you would be content to let those crowing fools — for they are fools, and history is going to show it — sink our ships, and murder Americans, and make plots against our government, and try to get us into war with other nations, and into civil war, and blow up our factories and our bridges — and not fight?"

"I believe in peace."

"Hang peace! Why, there isn't any peace! How in Sam Hill can you want to keep what isn't in existence? There hasn't been any peace in this happy-go-lucky country, bless it, since those dog-goned Germans goose-stepped over the Belgian frontier! Peace! Huh!"

"I do not defend the invasion of Belgium," stated Zenas, mildly. "I admit I feel that the principle is wrong and —"

"Who cares a cat's hind leg about principle, now the United States has finally reared and is shaking all her flags out, and getting her men and her guns and her ships into the ring?" shouted Thomas Dodd. He fairly danced up and down. "Don't I know that principle is behind the whole devilish mess? But now we have taken our stand on principle for granted, and are saying, 'Look here, Bill Hohenzollern, you have hit us; now we hit you.' Lord-a-mighty, it was all well enough to talk principle and high-mindedness when we begun, but now it is hit back, and sit on the whole crew like our fathers sat on the Indians. I tell you now, Zenas Lord, it is hit! Do ye hear me? Hit! Hit!"

"I believe in peace," said Zenas.

"Do you actually sit there and say, you whose folks did some tall fighting in the little baby wars we used to have, that you would stand for that usage any longer, and let them go on hitting us and turn the other cheek?"

"I believe in following the lead of Scripture," said Zenas.

"Well, here goes!" shouted Thomas Dodd. "I'll give you one chance to practise what you preach!" With that Thomas Dodd gave the man in the chair a mighty slap on his right cheek. Directly over its delicate pallor red finger-marks blazed out. Zenas said nothing. Slowly and with dignity he turned the other cheek. Thomas Dodd nearly knocked him out of his chair with a blow on the left jaw.

Then there was a crash. Zenas Lord's chair fell over backward and he was fighting Thomas Dodd. Zenas landed a terrible blow on the right cheek of Thomas, then on the left, with little fists that seemed as hard as steel. Zenas was a small man, but small men sometimes make mighty fighters. Zenas had always known he could fight. He would not, perhaps, have been a pacifist if he had not known that. Deep in his mind had lurked the knowledge of restrained power. For an old man he was amazing. He fairly seemed a blur of motion, so fast he rained blow after blow upon the other man.

Thomas Dodd was no coward. He had been taken by surprise. It was as if a dove had attacked him like a tiger; but he soon began to defend himself. Nothing except defense, and that only to a limited extent, was possible. As well attack a buzz-saw as that fierce old man who had turned from his precepts of peace.

Zenas simply could not be hit. When the blow landed he was not there, and immediately Thomas received one. The two were all over the room. The table and the lamp and a vase of flowers went over, and water and oil trickled over the carpet.

The fighters collided against the silver-gleaming picture over the low mantel, and that crashed down. Zenas

pushed Thomas against a gilt-framed mirror, and it cracked, and stars and fissures appeared with noises of explosions.

Always Thomas was on the defense, trying to dodge those blows off the steely little fists of the peaceful man, and never got in one blow himself. Thomas's nose was bleeding, his mouth was puffing, his eyes were closing. He was panting terribly. He was game withal. Never once did he whimper, but he was being worsted.

At last both men crashed down on the floor, and Zenas was sitting on Thomas and pounding the floor with Thomas's great head. Zenas was now beyond himself. The blood which had been held so long in check by laws of peace was over the dam, in flood tide. He was dangerous and terrible.

Zenas pounded the floor with the head of Thomas, and Thomas was gasping when the two old Sylvester brothers, who lived next door, came rushing in. With them was their niece Adeline and her husband, Marion Leicester.

For a moment not one trusted vision. The whole was monstrous and incredible. That little old Zenas Lord, who had antagonized everybody in Leicester and the Barrs by his peaceful attitude when the world was at fighting-point, was himself fighting and, it seemed, ready to murder another man, was unbelievable.

Marion Leicester, who wore the khaki and was home on furlough, stared. They all stared. Then Marion made a spring.

"You'll kill him if you don't stop that!" he called, and grasped Zenas's shoulders. They felt like shoulders of steel. Marion was strong, but he could not move those dreadful shoulders of rage. "Let up, for God's sake, man! You don't want to kill him!" he shouted.

Old Zenas twisted round a terrible face of white wrath. "That is just what I want to do," said he. "I want to kill him!"

Zenas made as if to give the floor another pound with the head of Thomas, but Adeline Leicester was before him. Thomas's head came down upon a very large feather cushion which Adeline had snatched from the sofa.

"Take away that damned thing!" screamed Zenas.

He snatched it away himself, and again raised the head. The two Sylvesters and Marion Leicester tugged at Zenas, but all three were not sufficient to prevent another thud.

"He'll kill him!" cried Adeline. She was sobbing and poising the sofa cushion when James Lord came in at a run.

"What in time —" he began.

"James! James!" gasped Adeline. "Your uncle has gone crazy! He's killing Mr. Dodd!"

Zenas unexpectedly spoke in a collected voice.

"I am not killing Thomas Dodd. I am killing war," said he.

"For Heaven's sake, give us a hand, Jim," gasped Marion Leicester, "or I believe in my soul your uncle will kill him! He's like a man made of steel."

As he spoke he again endeavored to get a hold on the old man's shoulders, but such awful tenacity of nerve and will was beyond his strength to overcome.

James was as small as his uncle and of about the same build, and he was young. Finally the four men forced Zenas into a chair, and Marion and James held him while the Sylvesters and Adeline attended to Thomas Dodd.

Presently Thomas Dodd was lying on the sofa, the blood washed from his face, a bandage soaked with liniment on his left jaw and another wet with ice-water on his eye. He was still game. As soon as he could speak he turned his right eye in the direction of old Zenas, held in his chair like a restrained charge of dynamite.

"What in tunket possessed you?" he demanded.

Zenas glared at him.

"You're licked!" he proclaimed, in a high voice of triumph.

James stared at him. He really thought his uncle had gone stark mad.

"What made you fly in the face of Scripture?" snarled the old man on the sofa.

"Scripture doesn't say what's to be done when the second cheek is hit," declared Zenas.

"Hum!" demanded the old man on the sofa. "Do you mean to say the second cheek of your own country wasn't hit when Germany tried her devilish plots and blew up our factories and more ships, after the Lusitania?"

Zenas was silent.

"And wasn't more than both cheeks of every decent country on the face of the earth hit after Belgium, anyhow?" demanded Thomas Dodd. "Wasn't all humanity hit? Wasn't — God Almighty himself hit?"

After another silence Zenas spoke in a queer, shocked voice.

"Maybe you are right," he said.

"Of course I'm right! But you had to have both your own cheeks hammered, and behave like Germany yourself, making out you were the injured one and pitching into your friend, before you could get it into your hard head. Yes, sir, the United States of America had both cheeks hit, and her heart hit, and the God in whom she believes hit, before she sailed in. Now she's going to hit, and I guess Germany will be on the sofa before long about as beat out as I am. Well, it was worth it. If you hadn't owned up you could have used my head for a tack-hammer till you were convinced I did a good thing when I boxed you. When a man's hit himself it sort of drives things home."

"You are right," said Zenas. He was very pale, and his face wore a strange expression.

He looked shocked and exalted. He also had been vanquished, although he bore not a mark on his wiry old body. Thomas Dodd had been subtly victorious. Zenas realized a soreness of his very soul, harder to be borne than all the bruises which he had inflicted on the other's body.

"It isn't Germany's body alone, but her soul we are fighting," he groaned, as if to himself.

"We are going to win," said Marion.

"Win fast enough," said Zenas, "but it's got to be a terrible victory. Germany on the sofa, body and soul!"

Suddenly he turned very pale and James caught him. The old pacifist had exhausted himself. He was helped into his bedroom and Adeline brought him a glass of port wine. He looked up at her after he had swallowed it.

"Sam Buzzy has got to keep his dog at home," said he.

"Lie still now and don't worry," said Adeline, soothingly.

"I am going to collect that demand note," said Zenas.

Adeline did not know what he meant.

"That's all right, so you shall. Don't worry," said she.

"How is Thomas going to get home?"

"Marion will drive him in the car."

"I didn't hurt him much?"

"No. Don't you worry."

After the Sylvesters had gone, and Marion had driven off, with Thomas Dodd propped up in the tonneau of the car, James Lord sat by himself in the outer room. He thought it wiser to leave his uncle alone. The bedroom door was ajar and he could hear if he stirred.

James sat with a bewildered face until he heard the Leicester car return; then he jumped up and opened the door for Marion. Both men tiptoed back into the room.

"I think he's asleep," whispered James.

The two stood looking at each other.

"What possessed him?" whispered Marion.

"Hanged if I know. Say, Marion, it's hard luck. I want to enlist. I don't want to hang around here when it's a war like this war. I'm disgraced for life if I don't enlist."

"I suppose you have to —"

"Support him, yes. But if he would collect a demand note that's due him he would have enough to set me free."

Marion gave a low whistle.

"A demand note?"

"Yes, my uncle Abel's."

"He ought to pay."

"Of course he ought. He would pay, too, but of course he'd get mad. Uncle Abel never paid for anything without raising Cain, and Uncle Zenas is all for peace."

Marion tapped his head significantly.

"I don't know," said James. "Sometimes I wonder myself."

"You needn't wonder," said a voice. "I'm just as right in my head as you are." He was still very pale, old Zenas, standing there in the bedroom door, but he spoke firmly. "I've made up my mind to fight a little for my own rights," said Zenas. "My fight with Thomas turned me clean round. I'm for every man that's able fighting for the country, and fighting for his own rights if he's able. Sam Buzzy has got to keep that dog of his home, and I'm going to collect that note, and — Look here, James Lord, I've got money besides that. You go and enlist, and there will be plenty for you to buy yourself a good kit, everything you want, and you can stay in the army, for all me, as long as you live. Maybe you'll get promoted. I've had money enough all along, only I wouldn't tell because I didn't approve of war. Better hurry and enlist before the war's over."

James looked at him, frightened.

Old Zenas laughed.

"You needn't think I'm crazy," said he. "You enlist, and you fight for all you are worth, if you think anything of me."

"I don't know how to thank you, uncle," said James, in a bewildered fashion.

Zenas looked at the man in khaki, then at his nephew. A strange light was in his eyes. His peaceful acquiescence with the buffets of the century of wrath and terror was gone forever. He was now of his day, the dreadful Day for all the world. He understood. He could not fight the common foe as he had fought Thomas Dodd; he was too old. The din of battle and trench life was not for him, but in him blazed like a torch the war spirit.

"How can I ever thank you, uncle?" James said, again.

"The head of Germania on a charger," said old Zenas Lord.

The Cut-Glass Bowl

by F. Scott Fitzgerald, from *Flappers and Philosophers*
Etext #4368

There was a rough stone age and a smooth stone age and a bronze age, and many years afterward a cut-glass age. In the cut-glass age, when young ladies had persuaded young men with long, curly mustaches to marry them, they sat down several months afterward and wrote thank-you notes for all sorts of cut-glass presents--punch-bowls, finger-bowls, dinner-glasses, wine-glasses, ice-cream dishes, bonbon dishes, decanters, and vases--for, though cut glass was nothing new in the nineties, it was then especially busy reflecting the dazzling light of fashion from the Back Bay to the fastnesses of the Middle West.

After the wedding the punch-bowls were arranged in the sideboard with the big bowl in the centre; the glasses were set up in the china-closet; the candlesticks were put at both ends of things--and then the struggle for existence began. The bonbon dish lost its little handle and became a pin-tray upstairs; a promenading cat knocked the little bowl off the sideboard, and the hired girl chipped the middle-sized one with the sugar-dish; then the wine-glasses succumbed to leg fractures, and even the dinner-glasses disappeared one by one like the ten little niggers, the last one ending up, scarred and maimed as a tooth-brush holder among other shabby genteels on the bathroom shelf. But by the time all this had happened the cut-glass age was over, anyway.

It was well past its first glory on the day the curious Mrs. Roger Fairboalt came to see the beautiful Mrs. Harold Piper.

"My dear," said the curious Mrs. Roger Fairboalt, "I LOVE your house. I think it's QUITE artistic."

"I'm SO glad," said the beautiful Mrs. Harold Piper, lights appearing in her young, dark eyes; "and you MUST come often. I'm almost ALWAYS alone in the afternoon."

Mrs. Fairboalt would have liked to remark that she didn't believe this at all and couldn't see how she'd be expected to--it was all over town that Mr. Freddy Gedney had been dropping in on Mrs. Piper five afternoons a week for the past six months. Mrs. Fairboalt was at that ripe age where she distrusted all beautiful women---

"I love the dining-room MOST," she said, "all that MARVELLOUS china, and that HUGE cut-glass bowl."

Mrs. Piper laughed, so prettily that Mrs. Fairboalt's lingering reservations about the Freddy Gedney story quite vanished.

"Oh, that big bowl!" Mrs. Piper's mouth forming the words was a vivid rose petal. "There's a story about that bowl---"

"Oh---"

"You remember young Carleton Canby? Well, he was very attentive at one time, and the night I told him I was going to marry Harold, seven years ago in ninety-two, he drew himself way up and said: 'Evylyn, I'm going to give a present that's as hard as you are and as beautiful and as empty and as easy to see through.' He frightened me a little--his eyes were so black. I thought he was going to deed me a haunted house or something that would explode when you opened it. That bowl came, and of course it's beautiful. Its diameter or circumference or something is two and a half feet--or perhaps it's three and a half. Anyway, the sideboard is really too small for it; it sticks way out."

"My DEAR, wasn't that ODD! And he left town about then didn't he?" Mrs. Fairboalt was scribbling italicized notes on her memory--"hard, beautiful, empty, and easy to see through."

"Yes, he went West--or South--or somewhere," answered Mrs. Piper, radiating that divine vagueness that helps to lift beauty out of time.

Mrs. Fairboalt drew on her gloves, approving the effect of largeness given by the open sweep from the spacious music-room through the library, disclosing a part of the dining-room beyond. It was really the nicest smaller house in town, and Mrs. Piper had talked of moving to a larger one on Devereaux Avenue. Harold Piper must be COINING money.

As she turned into the sidewalk under the gathering autumn dusk she assumed that disapproving, faintly unpleasant expression that almost all successful women of forty wear on the street.

If I were Harold Piper, she thought, I'd spend a LITTLE less time on business and a little more time at home. Some FRIEND should speak to him.

But if Mrs. Fairboalt had considered it a successful afternoon she would have named it a triumph had she waited two minutes longer. For while she was still a black receding figure a hundred yards down the street, a very good-looking distraught young man turned up the walk to the Piper house. Mrs. Piper answered the door-bell herself, and with a rather dismayed expression led him quickly into the library.

"I had to see you," he began wildly; "your note played the devil with me. Did Harold frighten you into this?"

She shook her head.

"I'm through, Fred," she said slowly, and her lips had never looked to him so much like tearings from a rose. "He came home last night sick with it. Jessie Piper's sense of duty was too much for her, so she went down to his office and told him. He was hurt and--oh, I can't help seeing it his way, Fred. He says we've been club gossip all summer and he didn't know it, and now he understands snatches of conversation he's caught and veiled hints people have dropped about me. He's mighty angry, Fred, and he loves me and I love him-- rather."

Gedney nodded slowly and half closed his eyes.

"Yes," he said "yes, my trouble's like yours. I can see other people's points of view too plainly." His gray eyes met her dark ones frankly. "The blessed thing's over. My God, Evylyn, I've been sitting down at the office all day looking at the outside of your letter, and looking at it and looking at it---"

"You've got to go, Fred," she said steadily, and the slight emphasis of hurry in her voice was a new thrust for him. "I gave him my word of honor I wouldn't see you. I know just how far I can go with Harold, and being here with you this evening is one of the things I can't do."

They were still standing, and as she spoke she made a little movement toward the door. Gedney looked at her miserably, trying, here at the end, to treasure up a last picture of her--and then suddenly both of them were stiffened into marble at the sound of steps on the walk outside. Instantly her arm reached out grasping the lapel of his coat --half urged, half swung him through the big door into the dark dining-room.

"I'll make him go up-stairs," she whispered close to his ear; "don't move till you hear him on the stairs. Then go out the front way."

Then he was alone listening as she greeted her husband in the hall.

Harold Piper was thirty-six, nine years older than his wife. He was handsome--with marginal notes: these being eyes that were too close together, and a certain woodenness when his face was in repose. His attitude toward this Gedney matter was typical of all his attitudes. He had told Evylyn that he considered the subject closed and would never reproach her nor allude to it in any form; and he told himself that this was rather a big way of looking at it--that she was not a little impressed. Yet, like all men who are preoccupied with their own broadness, he was exceptionally narrow.

He greeted Evylyn with emphasized cordiality this evening.

"You'll have to hurry and dress, Harold," she said eagerly; "we're going to the Bronsons'."

He nodded.

"It doesn't take me long to dress, dear," and, his words trailing off, he walked on into the library. Evylyn's heart clattered loudly.

"Harold---" she began, with a little catch in her voice, and followed him in. He was lighting a cigarette. "You'll have to hurry, Harold," she finished, standing in the doorway.

"Why?" he asked a trifle impatiently; "you're not dressed yourself yet, Evie."

He stretched out in a Morris chair and unfolded a newspaper. With a sinking sensation Evylyn saw that this meant at least ten

minutes--and Gedney was standing breathless in the next room. Supposing Harold decided that before he went upstairs he wanted a drink from the decanter on the sideboard. Then it occurred to her to forestall this contingency by bringing him the decanter and a glass. She dreaded calling his attention to the dining-room in any way, but she couldn't risk the other chance.

But at the same moment Harold rose and, throwing his paper down, came toward her.

"Evie, dear," he said, bending and putting his arms about her, "I hope you're not thinking about last night---" She moved close to him, trembling. "I know," he continued, "it was just an imprudent friendship on your part. We all make mistakes."

Evlyn hardly heard him. She was wondering if by sheer clinging to him she could draw him out and up the stairs. She thought of playing sick, asking to be carried up--unfortunately she knew he would lay her on the couch and bring her whiskey.

Suddenly her nervous tension moved up a last impossible notch. She had heard a very faint but quite unmistakable creak from the floor of the dining room. Fred was trying to get out the back way.

Then her heart took a flying leap as a hollow ringing note like a gong echoed and re-echoed through the house. Gedney's arm had struck the big cut-glass bowl.

"What's that!" cried Harold. "Who's there?"

She clung to him but he broke away, and the room seemed to crash about her ears. She heard the pantry-door swing open, a scuffle, the rattle of a tin pan, and in wild despair she rushed into the kitchen and pulled up the gas. Her husband's arm slowly unwound from Gedney's neck, and he stood there very still, first in amazement, then with pain dawning in his face.

"My golly!" he said in bewilderment, and then repeated: "My GOLLY!"

He turned as if to jump again at Gedney, stopped, his muscles visibly relaxed, and he gave a bitter little laugh.

"You people--you people---" Evlyn's arms were around him and her eyes were pleading with him frantically, but he pushed her away and sank dazed into a kitchen chair, his face like porcelain. "You've been doing things to me, Evlyn. Why, you little devil! You little DEVIL!"

She had never felt so sorry for him; she had never loved him so much.

"It wasn't her fault," said Gedney rather humbly. "I just came." But Piper shook his head, and his expression when he stared up was as if some physical accident had jarred his mind into a temporary inability to function. His eyes, grown suddenly pitiful, struck a deep, unsounded chord in Evlyn--and simultaneously a furious anger surged in her. She felt her

eyelids burning; she stamped her foot violently; her hands scurried nervously over the table as if searching for a weapon, and then she flung herself wildly at Gedney.

"Get out!" she screamed, dark eyes blazing, little fists beating helplessly on his outstretched arm. "You did this! Get out of here--get out--get OUT! GET OUT!"

II

Concerning Mrs. Harold Piper at thirty-five, opinion was divided--women said she was still handsome; men said she was pretty no longer. And this was probably because the qualities in her beauty that women had feared and men had followed had vanished. Her eyes were still as large and as dark and as sad, but the mystery had departed; their sadness was no longer eternal, only human, and she had developed a habit, when she was startled or annoyed, of twitching her brows together and blinking several times. Her mouth also had lost: the red had receded and the faint down-turning of its corners when she smiled, that had added to the sadness of the eyes and been vaguely mocking and beautiful, was quite gone. When she smiled now the corners of her lips turned up. Back in the days when she revelled in her own beauty Evylyn had enjoyed that smile of hers--she had accentuated it. When she stopped accentuating it, it faded out and the last of her mystery with it.

Evylyn had ceased accentuating her smile within a month after the Freddy Gedney affair. Externally things had gone on very much as they had before. But in those few minutes during which she had discovered how much she loved her husband, Evylyn had realized how indelibly she had hurt him. For a month she struggled against aching silences, wild reproaches and accusations--she pled with him, made quiet, pitiful little love to him, and he laughed at her bitterly--and then she, too, slipped gradually into silence and a shadowy, impenetrable barrier dropped between them. The surge of love that had risen in her she lavished on Donald, her little boy, realizing him almost wonderingly as a part of her life.

The next year a piling up of mutual interests and responsibilities and some stray flicker from the past brought husband and wife together again--but after a rather pathetic flood of passion Evylyn realized that her great opportunity was gone. There simply wasn't anything left. She might have been youth and love for both--but that time of silence had slowly dried up the springs of affection and her own desire to drink again of them was dead.

She began for the first time to seek women friends, to prefer books she had read before, to sew a little where she could watch her two children to whom she was devoted. She worried about little things--if she saw crumbs on the dinner-table her mind drifted off the conversation: she was receding gradually into middle age.

Her thirty-fifth birthday had been an exceptionally busy one, for they were entertaining on short notice that night, as she stood in her bedroom window in the late afternoon she discovered that she was quite tired. Ten years before she would have lain down and slept, but now she had a feeling that things needed watching: maids were cleaning down-stairs, bric-a-brac was all over the floor, and there were sure to be grocery-men that had to be talked to imperatively--and then there was a letter to write Donald, who was fourteen and in his first year away at school.

She had nearly decided to lie down, nevertheless, when she heard a sudden familiar signal from little Julie down-stairs. She compressed her lips, her brows twitched together, and she blinked.

"Julie!" she called.

"Ah-h-h-ow!" prolonged Julie plaintively. Then the voice of Hilda, the second maid, floated up the stairs.

"She cut herself a little, Mis' Piper."

Evylyn flew to her sewing-basket, rummaged until she found a torn handkerchief, and hurried downstairs. In a moment Julie was crying in her arms as she searched for the cut, faint, disparaging evidences of which appeared on Julie's dress.

"My THU-umb!" explained Julie. "Oh-h-h-h, t'urts."

"It was the bowl here, the he one," said Hilda apologetically. "It was waitin' on the floor while I polished the sideboard, and Julie come along an' went to foolin' with it. She yust scratch herself."

Evylyn frowned heavily at Hilda, and twisting Julie decisively in her lap, began tearing strips of the handkerchief.

"Now--let's see it, dear."

Julie held it up and Evelyn pounced.

"There!"

Julie surveyed her swathed thumb doubtfully. She crooked it; it waggled. A pleased, interested look appeared in her tear-stained face. She sniffled and waggled it again.

"You PRECIOUS!" cried Evylyn and kissed her, but before she left the room she levelled another frown at Hilda. Careless! Servants all that way nowadays. If she could get a good Irishwoman-- but you couldn't any more--and these Swedes---

At five o'clock Harold arrived and, coming up to her room, threatened in a suspiciously jovial tone to kiss her thirty-five times for her birthday. Evylyn resisted.

"You've been drinking," she said shortly, and then added qualitatively, "a little. You know I loathe the smell of it."

"Evie," he said after a pause, seating himself in a chair by the window, "I can tell you something now. I guess you've known things haven't been going quite right down-town."

She was standing at the window combing her hair, but at these words she turned and looked at him.

"How do you mean? You've always said there was room for more than one wholesale hardware house in town." Her voice expressed some alarm.

"There WAS," said Harold significantly, "but this Clarence Ahearn is a smart man."

"I was surprised when you said he was coming to dinner."

"Evie," he went on, with another slap at his knee, "after January first 'The Clarence Ahearn Company' becomes 'The Ahearn, Piper Company'--and 'Piper Brothers' as a company ceases to exist."

Evlyn was startled. The sound of his name in second place was somehow hostile to her; still he appeared jubilant.

"I don't understand, Harold."

"Well, Evie, Ahearn has been fooling around with Marx. If those two had combined we'd have been the little fellow, struggling along, picking up smaller orders, hanging back on risks. It's a question of capital, Evie, and 'Ahearn and Marx' would have had the business just like 'Ahearn and Piper' is going to now." He paused and coughed and a little cloud of whiskey floated up to her nostrils. "Tell you the truth, Evie, I've suspected that Ahearn's wife had something to do with it. Ambitious little lady, I'm told. Guess she knew the Marxes couldn't help her much here."

"Is she--common?" asked Evie.

"Never met her, I'm sure--but I don't doubt it. Clarence Ahearn's name's been up at the Country Club five months--no action taken." He waved his hand disparagingly. "Ahearn and I had lunch together to-day and just about clinched it, so I thought it'd be nice to have him and his wife up to-night--just have nine, mostly family. After all, it's a big thing for me, and of course we'll have to see something of them, Evie."

"Yes," said Evie thoughtfully, "I suppose we will."

Evlyn was not disturbed over the social end of it--but the idea of "Piper Brothers" becoming "The Ahearn, Piper Company" startled her. It seemed like going down in the world.

Half an hour later, as she began to dress for dinner, she heard his voice from down-stairs.

"Oh, Evie, come down!"

She went out into the hall and called over the banister:

"What is it?"

"I want you to help me make some of that punch before dinner. "

Hurriedly rehooking her dress, she descended the stairs and found him grouping the essentials on the dining-room table. She went to the sideboard and, lifting one of the bowls, carried it over.

"Oh, no," he protested, "let's use the big one. There'll be Ahearn and his wife and you and I and Milton, that's five, and Tom and Jessie, that's seven: and your sister and Joe Ambler, that's nine. You don't know how quick that stuff goes when YOU make it."

"We'll use this bowl," she insisted. "It'll hold plenty. You know how Tom is."

Tom Lowrie, husband to Jessie, Harold's first cousin, was rather inclined to finish anything in a liquid way that he began.

Harold shook his head.

"Don't be foolish. That one holds only about three quarts and there's nine of us, and the servants'll want some--and it isn't strong punch. It's so much more cheerful to have a lot, Evie; we don't have to drink all of it."

"I say the small one."

Again he shook his head obstinately.

"No; be reasonable."

"I AM reasonable," she said shortly. "I don't want any drunken men in the house."

"Who said you did?"

"Then use the small bowl."

"Now, Evie---"

He grasped the smaller bowl to lift it back. Instantly her hands were on it, holding it down. There was a momentary struggle, and then, with a little exasperated grunt, he raised his side, slipped it from her fingers, and carried it to the sideboard.

She looked at him and tried to make her expression contemptuous, but he only laughed. Acknowledging her defeat but disclaiming all future interest in the punch, she left the room.

III

At seven-thirty, her cheeks glowing and her high-piled hair

gleaming with a suspicion of brilliantine, Evylyn descended the stairs. Mrs. Ahearn, a little woman concealing a slight nervousness under red hair and an extreme Empire gown, greeted her volubly. Evelyn disliked her on the spot, but the husband she rather approved of. He had keen blue eyes and a natural gift of pleasing people that might have made him, socially, had he not so obviously committed the blunder of marrying too early in his career.

"I'm glad to know Piper's wife," he said simply. "It looks as though your husband and I are going to see a lot of each other in the future."

She bowed, smiled graciously, and turned to greet the others: Milton Piper, Harold's quiet, unassertive younger brother; the two Lowries, Jessie and Tom; Irene, her own unmarried sister; and finally Joe Ambler, a confirmed bachelor and Irene's perennial beau.

Harold led the way into dinner.

"We're having a punch evening," he announced jovially--Evylyn saw that he had already sampled his concoction--"so there won't be any cocktails except the punch. It's m' wife's greatest achievement, Mrs. Ahearn; she'll give you the recipe if you want it; but owing to a slight"--he caught his wife's eye and paused--"to a slight indisposition; I'm responsible for this batch. Here's how!"

All through dinner there was punch, and Evylyn, noticing that Ahearn and Milton Piper and all the women were shaking their heads negatively at the maid, knew she had been right about the bowl; it was still half full. She resolved to caution Harold directly afterward, but when the women left the table Mrs. Ahearn cornered her, and she found herself talking cities and dressmakers with a polite show of interest.

"We've moved around a lot," chattered Mrs. Ahearn, her red head nodding violently. "Oh, yes, we've never stayed so long in a town before--but I do hope we're here for good. I like it here; don't you?"

"Well, you see, I've always lived here, so, naturally---"

"Oh, that's true," said Mrs. Ahearn and laughed. Clarence always used to tell me he had to have a wife he could come home to and say: "Well, we're going to Chicago to-morrow to live, so pack up."

I got so I never expected to live ANYwhere." She laughed her little laugh again; Evylyn suspected that it was her society laugh.

"Your husband is a very able man, I imagine."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Ahearn assured her eagerly. "He's brainy, Clarence is. Ideas and enthusiasm, you know. Finds out what he wants and then goes and gets it."

Evlyn nodded. She was wondering if the men were still drinking punch back in the dining-room. Mrs. Ahearn's history kept unfolding jerkily, but Evlyn had ceased to listen. The first odor of massed cigars began to drift in. It wasn't really a large house, she reflected; on an evening like this the library sometimes grew blue with smoke, and next day one had to leave the windows open for hours to air the heavy staleness out of the curtains. Perhaps this partnership might . . . she began to speculate on a new house . . .

Mrs. Ahearn's voice drifted in on her:

"I really would like the recipe if you have it written down somewhere---"

Then there was a sound of chairs in the dining-room and the men strolled in. Evlyn saw at once that her worst fears were realized. Harold's face was flushed and his words ran together at the ends of sentences, while Tom Lowrie lurched when he walked and narrowly missed Irene's lap when he tried to sink onto the couch beside her. He sat there blinking dazedly at the company. Evlyn found herself blinking back at him, but she saw no humor in it. Joe Ambler was smiling contentedly and purring on his cigar. Only Ahearn and Milton Piper seemed unaffected.

"It's a pretty fine town, Ahearn," said Ambler, "you'll find that."

"I've found it so," said Ahearn pleasantly.

"You find it more, Ahearn," said Harold, nodding emphatically "'f I've an'thin' do 'th it."

He soared into a eulogy of the city, and Evlyn wondered uncomfortably if it bored every one as it bored her. Apparently not. They were all listening attentively. Evlyn broke in at the first gap.

"Where've you been living, Mr. Ahearn?" she asked interestedly. Then she remembered that Mrs. Ahearn had told her, but it didn't matter. Harold mustn't talk so much. He was such an ASS when he'd been drinking. But he plopped directly back in.

"Tell you, Ahearn. Firs' you wanna get a house up here on the hill. Get Stearne house or Ridgeway house. Wanna have it so people say: 'There's Ahearn house.' Solid, you know, tha's effec' it gives."

Evlyn flushed. This didn't sound right at all. Still Ahearn didn't seem to notice anything amiss, only nodded gravely.

"Have you been looking---" But her words trailed off unheard as Harold's voice boomed on.

"Get house--tha's start. Then you get know people. Snobbish town first toward outsider, but not long--after know you. People like you"--he indicated Ahearn and his wife with a sweeping gesture--"all right. Cordial as an'thin' once get by first barrer-bar- barrer--" He swallowed, and then said "barrier,"

repeated it masterfully.

Evylyn looked appealingly at her brother-in-law, but before he could intercede a thick mumble had come crowding out of Tom Lowrie, hindered by the dead cigar which he gripped firmly with his teeth.

"Huma uma ho huma ahdy um---"

"What?" demanded Harold earnestly.

Resignedly and with difficulty Tom removed the cigar--that is, he removed part of it, and then blew the remainder with a WHUT sound across the room, where it landed liquidly and limply in Mrs. Ahearn's lap.

"Beg pardon," he mumbled, and rose with the vague intention of going after it. Milton's hand on his coat collapsed him in time, and Mrs. Ahearn not ungracefully flounced the tobacco from her skirt to the floor, never once looking at it.

"I was sayin'," continued Tom thickly, "'fore 'at happened,"--he waved his hand apologetically toward Mrs. Ahearn--"I was sayin' I heard all truth that Country Club matter."

Milton leaned and whispered something to him.

"Lemme 'lone," he said petulantly; "know what I'm doin'. 'Ats what they came for."

Evylyn sat there in a panic, trying to make her mouth form words. She saw her sister's sardonic expression and Mrs. Ahearn's face turning a vivid red. Ahearn was looking down at his watch-chain, fingering it.

"I heard who's been keepin' y' out, an' he's not a bit better'n you. I can fix whole damn thing up. Would've before, but I didn't know you. Harol' tol' me you felt bad about the thing---"

Milton Piper rose suddenly and awkwardly to his feet. In a second every one was standing tensely and Milton was saying something very hurriedly about having to go early, and the Ahearns were listening with eager intentness. Then Mrs. Ahearn swallowed and turned with a forced smile toward Jessie. Evylyn saw Tom lurch forward and put his hand on Ahearns shoulder--and suddenly she was listening to a new, anxious voice at her elbow, and, turning, found Hilda, the second maid.

"Please, Mis' Piper, I tank Yulie got her hand poisoned. It's all swole up and her cheeks is hot and she's moanin' an' groanin'---"

"Julie is?" Evylyn asked sharply. The party suddenly receded. She turned quickly, sought with her eyes for Mrs. Ahearn, slipped toward her.

"If you'll excuse me, Mrs.--" She had momentarily forgotten the name, but she went right on: "My little girl's been taken sick. I'll be down when I can." She turned and ran quickly up the

stairs, retaining a confused picture of rays of cigar smoke and a loud discussion in the centre of the room that seemed to be developing into an argument.

Switching on the light in the nursery, she found Julie tossing feverishly and giving out odd little cries. She put her hand against the cheeks. They were burning. With an exclamation she followed the arm down under the cover until she found the hand. Hilda was right. The whole thumb was swollen to the wrist and in the centre was a little inflamed sore. Blood-poisoning! her mind cried in terror. The bandage had come off the cut and she'd gotten something in it. She'd cut it at three o'clock--it was now nearly eleven. Eight hours. Blood-poisoning couldn't possibly develop so soon.

She rushed to the 'phone.

Doctor Martin across the street was out. Doctor Foulke, their family physician, didn't answer. She racked her brains and in desperation called her throat specialist, and bit her lip furiously while he looked up the numbers of two physicians. During that interminable moment she thought she heard loud voices down-stairs--but she seemed to be in another world now. After fifteen minutes she located a physician who sounded angry and sulky at being called out of bed. She ran back to the nursery and, looking at the hand, found it was somewhat more swollen.

"Oh, God!" she cried, and kneeling beside the bed began smoothing back Julie's hair over and over. With a vague idea of getting some hot water, she rose and stared toward the door, but the lace of her dress caught in the bed-rail and she fell forward on her hands and knees. She struggled up and jerked frantically at the lace. The bed moved and Julie groaned. Then more quietly but with suddenly fumbling fingers she found the pleat in front, tore the whole pannier completely off, and rushed from the room.

Out in the hall she heard a single loud, insistent voice, but as she reached the head of the stairs it ceased and an outer door banged.

The music-room came into view. Only Harold and Milton were there, the former leaning against a chair, his face very pale, his collar open, and his mouth moving loosely.

"What's the matter?"

Milton looked at her anxiously.

"There was a little trouble---"

Then Harold saw her and, straightening up with an effort, began to speak.

"Sult m'own cousin m'own house. God damn common nouveau rish. 'Sult m'own cousin---"

"Tom had trouble with Ahearn and Harold interfered," said Milton.

"My Lord Milton," cried Evylyn, "couldn't you have done something?"

"I tried; I---"

"Julie's sick," she interrupted; "she's poisoned herself. Get him to bed if you can."

Harold looked up.

"Julie sick?"

Paying no attention, Evylyn brushed by through the dining-room, catching sight, with a burst of horror, of the big punch-bowl still on the table, the liquid from melted ice in its bottom. She heard steps on the front stairs--it was Milton helping Harold up--and then a mumble: "Why, Julie's a'right'."

"Don't let him go into the nursery!" she shouted.

The hours blurred into a nightmare. The doctor arrived just before midnight and within a half-hour had lanced the wound. He left at two after giving her the addresses of two nurses to call up and promising to return at half past six. It was blood-poisoning.

At four, leaving Hilda by the bedside, she went to her room, and slipping with a shudder out of her evening dress, kicked it into a corner. She put on a house dress and returned to the nursery while Hilda went to make coffee.

Not until noon could she bring herself to look into Harold's room, but when she did it was to find him awake and staring very miserably at the ceiling. He turned blood-shot hollow eyes upon her. For a minute she hated him, couldn't speak. A husky voice came from the bed.

"What time is it?"

"Noon."

"I made a damn fool---"

"It doesn't matter," she said sharply. "Julie's got blood-poisoning. They may"--she choked over the words--"they think she'll have to lose her hand."

"What?"

"She cut herself on that--that bowl."

"Last night?"

"Oh, what does it matter?" she cried; "she's got blood-poisoning. Can't you hear?" He looked at her bewildered--sat half-way up in bed.

"I'll get dressed," he said.

Her anger subsided and a great wave of weariness and pity for him rolled over her. After all, it was his trouble, too."

"Yes," she answered listlessly, "I suppose you'd better."

IV

If Evylyn's beauty had hesitated in her early thirties it came to an abrupt decision just afterward and completely left her. A tentative outlay of wrinkles on her face suddenly deepened and flesh collected rapidly on her legs and hips and arms. Her mannerism of drawing her brows together had become an expression--it was habitual when she was reading or speaking and even while she slept. She was forty-six.

As in most families whose fortunes have gone down rather than up, she and Harold had drifted into a colorless antagonism. In repose they looked at each other with the toleration they might have felt for broken old chairs; Evylyn worried a little when he was sick and did her best to be cheerful under the wearying depression of living with a disappointed man.

Family bridge was over for the evening and she sighed with relief. She had made more mistakes than usual this evening and she didn't care. Irene shouldn't have made that remark about the infantry being particularly dangerous. There had been no letter for three weeks now, and, while this was nothing out of the ordinary, it never failed to make her nervous; naturally she hadn't known how many clubs were out.

Harold had gone up-stairs, so she stepped out on the porch for a breath of fresh air. There was a bright glamour of moonlight diffusing on the sidewalks and lawns, and with a little half yawn, half laugh, she remembered one long moonlight affair of her youth. It was astonishing to think that life had once been the sum of her current love-affairs. It was now the sum of her current problems.

There was the problem of Julie--Julie was thirteen, and lately she was growing more and more sensitive about her deformity and preferred to stay always in her room reading. A few years before she had been frightened at the idea of going to school, and Evylyn could not bring herself to send her, so she grew up in her mother's shadow, a pitiful little figure with the artificial hand that she made no attempt to use but kept forlornly in her pocket. Lately she had been taking lessons in using it because Evylyn had feared she would cease to lift the arm altogether, but after the lessons, unless she made a move with it in listless obedience to her mother, the little hand would creep back to the pocket of her dress. For a while her dresses were made without pockets, but Julie had moped around the house so miserably at a loss all one month that Evylyn weakened and never tried the experiment again.

The problem of Donald had been different from the start. She had attempted vainly to keep him near her as she had tried to teach

Julie to lean less on her--lately the problem of Donald had been snatched out of her hands; his division had been abroad for three months.

She yawned again--life was a thing for youth. What a happy youth she must have had! She remembered her pony, Bijou, and the trip to Europe with her mother when she was eighteen---

"Very, very complicated," she said aloud and severely to the moon, and, stepping inside, was about to close the door when she heard a noise in the library and started.

It was Martha, the middle-aged servant: they kept only one now.

"Why, Martha!" she said in surprise.

Martha turned quickly.

"Oh, I thought you was up-stairs. I was jist---"

"Is anything the matter?"

Martha hesitated.

"No; I---" She stood there fidgeting. "It was a letter, Mrs. Piper, that I put somewhere.

"A letter? Your own letter?" asked Evylyn.

"No, it was to you. 'Twas this afternoon, Mrs. Piper, in the last mail. The postman give it to me and then the back door-bell rang. I had it in my hand, so I must have stuck it somewhere. I thought I'd just slip in now and find it."

"What sort of a letter? From Mr. Donald?"

"No, it was an advertisement, maybe, or a business letter. It was a long narrow one, I remember."

They began a search through the music-room, looking on trays and mantelpieces, and then through the library, feeling on the tops of rows of books. Martha paused in despair.

"I can't think where. I went straight to the kitchen. The dining-room, maybe." She started hopefully for the dining-room, but turned suddenly at the sound of a gasp behind her. Evylyn had sat down heavily in a Morris chair, her brows drawn very close together eyes blanking furiously.

"Are you sick?"

For a minute there was no answer. Evylyn sat there very still and Martha could see the very quick rise and fall of her bosom.

"Are you sick?" she repeated.

"No," said Evylyn slowly, "but I know where the letter is. Go 'way, Martha. I know."

Wonderingly, Martha withdrew, and still Evylyn sat there, only the muscles around her eyes moving --contracting and relaxing and contracting again. She knew now where the letter was--she knew as well as if she had put it there herself. And she felt instinctively and unquestionably what the letter was. It was long and narrow like an advertisement, but up in the corner in large letters it said "War Department" and, in smaller letters below, "Official Business." She knew it lay there in the big bowl with her name in ink on the outside and her soul's death within.

Rising uncertainly, she walked toward the dining-room, feeling her way along the bookcases and through the doorway. After a moment she found the light and switched it on.

There was the bowl, reflecting the electric light in crimson squares edged with black and yellow squares edged with blue, ponderous and glittering, grotesquely and triumphantly ominous. She took a step forward and paused again; another step and she would see over the top and into the inside--another step and she would see an edge of white--another step--her hands fell on the rough, cold surface--

In a moment she was tearing it open, fumbling with an obstinate fold, holding it before her while the typewritten page glared out and struck at her. Then it fluttered like a bird to the floor. The house that had seemed whirring, buzzing a moment since, was suddenly very quiet; a breath of air crept in through the open front door carrying the noise of a passing motor; she heard faint sounds from upstairs and then a grinding racket in the pipe behind the bookcases--her husband turning of a water-tap---

And in that instant it was as if this were not, after all, Donald's hour except in so far as he was a marker in the insidious contest that had gone on in sudden surges and long, listless interludes between Evylyn and this cold, malignant thing of beauty, a gift of enmity from a man whose face she had long since forgotten. With its massive, brooding passivity it lay there in the centre of her house as it had lain for years, throwing out the ice-like beams of a thousand eyes, perverse glitterings merging each into each, never aging, never changing.

Evylyn sat down on the edge of the table and stared at it fascinated. It seemed to be smiling now, a very cruel smile, as if to say:

"You see, this time I didn't have to hurt you directly. I didn't bother. You know it was I who took your son away. You know how cold I am and how hard and how beautiful, because once you were just as cold and hard and beautiful."

The bowl seemed suddenly to turn itself over and then to distend and swell until it became a great canopy that glittered and trembled over the room, over the house, and, as the walls melted slowly into mist, Evylyn saw that it was still moving out, out and far away from her, shutting off far horizons and suns and moons and stars except as inky blots seen faintly through it. And under it walked all the people, and the light that came through to them was refracted and twisted until shadow seemed light and

light seemed shadow--until the whole panoply of the world became changed and distorted under the twinkling heaven of the bowl.

Then there came a far-away, booming voice like a low, clear bell. It came from the centre of the bowl and down the great sides to the ground and then bounced toward her eagerly.

"You see, I am fate," it shouted, "and stronger than your puny plans; and I am how-things-turn-out and I am different from your little dreams, and I am the flight of time and the end of beauty and unfulfilled desire; all the accidents and imperceptions and the little minutes that shape the crucial hours are mine. I am the exception that proves no rules, the limits of your control, the condiment in the dish of life."

The booming sound stopped; the echoes rolled away over the wide land to the edge of the bowl that bounded the world and up the great sides and back to the centre where they hummed for a moment and died. Then the great walls began slowly to bear down upon her, growing smaller and smaller, coming closer and closer as if to crush her; and as she clinched her hands and waited for the swift bruise of the cold glass, the bowl gave a sudden wrench and turned over--and lay there on the side-board, shining and inscrutable, reflecting in a hundred prisms, myriad, many-colored glints and gleams and crossings and interlaces of light.

The cold wind blew in again through the front door, and with a desperate, frantic energy Evylyn stretched both her arms around the bowl. She must be quick--she must be strong. She tightened her arms until they ached, tauted the thin strips of muscle under her soft flesh, and with a mighty effort raised it and held it. She felt the wind blow cold on her back where her dress had come apart from the strain of her effort, and as she felt it she turned toward it and staggered under the great weight out through the library and on toward the front door. She must be quick--she must be strong. The blood in her arms throbbed dully and her knees kept giving way under her, but the feel of the cool glass was good.

Out the front door she tottered and over to the stone steps, and there, summoning every fibre of her soul and body for a last effort, swung herself half around--for a second, as she tried to loose her hold, her numb fingers clung to the rough surface, and in that second she slipped and, losing balance, toppled forward with a despairing cry, her arms still around the bowl . . . down . . .

Over the way lights went on; far down the block the crash was heard, and pedestrians rushed up wonderingly; up-stairs a tired man awoke from the edge of sleep and a little girl whimpered in a haunted doze. And all over the moonlit sidewalk around the still, black form, hundreds of prisms and cubes and splinters of glass reflected the light in little gleams of blue, and black edged with yellow, and yellow, and crimson edged with black.

"YAH! YAH! YAH!"

by Jack London, from *South Sea Tales*
EBook #1208

He was a whiskey-guzzling Scotchman, and he downed his whiskey neat, beginning with his first tot punctually at six in the morning, and thereafter repeating it at regular intervals throughout the day till bedtime, which was usually midnight. He slept but five hours out of the twenty-four, and for the remaining nineteen hours he was quietly and decently drunk. During the eight weeks I spent with him on Oolong Atoll, I never saw him draw a sober breath. In fact, his sleep was so short that he never had time to sober up. It was the most beautiful and orderly perennial drunk I have ever observed.

McAllister was his name. He was an old man, and very shaky on his pins. His hand trembled as with a palsy, especially noticeable when he poured his whiskey, though I never knew him to spill a drop. He had been twenty-eight years in Melanesia, ranging from German New Guinea to the German Solomons, and so thoroughly had he become identified with that portion of the world, that he habitually spoke in that bastard lingo called "bech-de-mer." Thus, in conversation with me, SUN HE COME UP meant sunrise; KAI-KAI HE STOP meant that dinner was served; and BELLY BELONG ME WALK ABOUT meant that he was sick at his stomach. He was a small man, and a withered one, burned inside and outside by ardent spirits and ardent sun. He was a cinder, a bit of a clinker of a man, a little animated clinker, not yet quite cold, that moved stiffly and by starts and jerks like an automaton. A gust of wind would have blown him away. He weighed ninety pounds.

But the immense thing about him was the power with which he ruled. Oolong Atoll was one hundred and forty miles in circumference. One steered by compass course in its lagoon. It was populated by five thousand Polynesians, all strapping men and women, many of them standing six feet in height and weighing a couple of hundred pounds. Oolong was two hundred and fifty miles from the nearest land. Twice a year a little schooner called to collect copra. The one white man on Oolong was McAllister, petty trader and unintermittent guzzler; and he ruled Oolong and its six thousand savages with an iron hand. He said come, and they came, go, and they went. They never questioned his will nor judgment. He was cantankerous as only an aged Scotchman can be, and interfered continually in their personal affairs. When Nugu, the king's daughter, wanted to marry Haunau from the other end of the atoll, her father said yes; but McAllister said no, and the marriage never came off. When the king wanted to buy a certain islet in the lagoon from the chief priest, McAllister said no. The king was in debt to the Company to the tune of 180,000 cocoanuts, and until that was paid he was not to spend a single cocoanut on anything else.

And yet the king and his people did not love McAllister. In truth, they hated him horribly, and, to my knowledge, the whole population, with the priests at the head, tried vainly for three months to pray him to death. The devil-devils they sent after him were awe-inspiring, but since McAllister did not believe in devil-devils, they were without power over him. With drunken Scotchmen all signs fail. They gathered up scraps of food which had touched his lips, an empty whiskey bottle, a cocoanut from which he had drunk, and even his spittle, and performed all kinds of deviltries over them. But

McAllister lived on. His health was superb. He never caught fever; nor coughs nor colds; dysentery passed him by; and the malignant ulcers and vile skin diseases that attack blacks and whites alike in that climate never fastened upon him. He must have been so saturated with alcohol as to defy the lodgment of germs. I used to imagine them falling to the ground in showers of microscopic cinders as fast as they entered his whiskey-sodden aura. No one loved him, not even germs, while he loved only whiskey, and still he lived.

I was puzzled. I could not understand six thousand natives putting up with that withered shrimp of a tyrant. It was a miracle that he had not died suddenly long since. Unlike the cowardly Melanesians, the people were high-stomached and warlike. In the big graveyard, at head and feet of the graves, were relics of past sanguinary history--blubber-spades, rusty old bayonets and cutlasses, copper bolts, rudder-irons, harpoons, bomb guns, bricks that could have come from nowhere but a whaler's trying-out furnace, and old brass pieces of the sixteenth century that verified the traditions of the early Spanish navigators. Ship after ship had come to grief on Oolong. Not thirty years before, the whaler BLENNERDALE, running into the lagoon for repair, had been cut off with all hands. In similar fashion had the crew of the GASKET, a sandalwood trader, perished. There was a big French bark, the TOULON, becalmed off the atoll, which the islanders boarded after a sharp tussle and wrecked in the Lipau Passage, the captain and a handful of sailors escaping in the longboat. Then there were the Spanish pieces, which told of the loss of one of the early explorers. All this, of the vessels named, is a matter of history, and is to be found in the SOUTH PACIFIC SAILING DIRECTORY. But that there was other history, unwritten, I was yet to learn. In the meantime I puzzled why six thousand primitive savages let one degenerate Scotch despot live.

One hot afternoon McAllister and I sat on the veranda looking out over the lagoon, with all its wonder of jeweled colors. At our backs, across the hundred yards of palm-studded sand, the outer surf roared on the reef. It was dreadfully warm. We were in four degree south latitude and the sun was directly overhead, having crossed the Line a few days before on its journey south. There was no wind--not even a catspaw. The season of the southeast trade was drawing to an early close, and the northwest monsoon had not yet begun to blow.

"They can't dance worth a damn," said McAllister.

I had happened to mention that the Polynesian dances were superior to the Papuan, and this McAllister had denied, for no other reason than his cantankerousness. But it was too hot to argue, and I said nothing. Besides, I had never seen the Oolong people dance.

"I'll prove it to you," he announced, beckoning to the black New Hanover boy, a labor recruit, who served as cook and general house servant. "Hey, you, boy, you tell 'm one fella king come along me."

The boy departed, and back came the prime minister, perturbed, ill at ease, and garrulous with apologetic explanation. In short, the king slept, and was not to be disturbed.

"King he plenty strong fella sleep," was his final sentence.

McAllister was in such a rage that the prime minister incontinently

fled, to return with the king himself. They were a magnificent pair, the king especially, who must have been all of six feet three inches in height. His features had the eagle-like quality that is so frequently found in those of the North American Indian. He had been molded and born to rule. His eyes flashed as he listened, but right meekly he obeyed McAllister's command to fetch a couple of hundred of the best dancers, male and female, in the village. And dance they did, for two mortal hours, under that broiling sun. They did not love him for it, and little he cared, in the end dismissing them with abuse and sneers.

The abject servility of those magnificent savages was terrifying. How could it be? What was the secret of his rule? More and more I puzzled as the days went by, and though I observed perpetual examples of his undisputed sovereignty, never a clew was there as to how it was.

One day I happened to speak of my disappointment in failing to trade for a beautiful pair of orange cowries. The pair was worth five pounds in Sydney if it was worth a cent. I had offered two hundred sticks of tobacco to the owner, who had held out for three hundred. When I casually mentioned the situation, McAllister immediately sent for the man, took the shells from him, and turned them over to me. Fifty sticks were all he permitted me to pay for them. The man accepted the tobacco and seemed overjoyed at getting off so easily. As for me, I resolved to keep a bridle on my tongue in the future. And still I mulled over the secret of McAllister's power. I even went to the extent of asking him directly, but all he did was to cock one eye, look wise, and take another drink.

One night I was out fishing in the lagoon with Oti, the man who had been mulcted of the cowries. Privily, I had made up to him an additional hundred and fifty sticks, and he had come to regard me with a respect that was almost veneration, which was curious, seeing that he was an old man, twice my age at least.

"What name you fella kanaka all the same pickaninny?" I began on him. "This fella trader he one fella. You fella kanaka plenty fella too much. You fella kanaka just like 'm dog--plenty fright along that fella trader. He no eat you, fella. He no get 'm teeth along him. What name you too much fright?"

"S'pose plenty fella kanaka kill 'm?" he asked.

"He die," I retorted. "You fella kanaka kill 'm plenty fella white man long time before. What name you fright this fella white man?"

"Yes, we kill 'm plenty," was his answer. "My word! Any amount! Long time before. One time, me young fella too much, one big fella ship he stop outside. Wind he no blow. Plenty fella kanaka we get 'm canoe, plenty fella canoe, we go catch 'm that fella ship. My word--we catch 'm big fella fight. Two, three white men shoot like hell. We no fright. We come alongside, we go up side, plenty fella, maybe I think fifty-ten (five hundred). One fella white Mary (woman) belong that fella ship. Never before I see 'm white Mary. Bime by plenty white man finish. One fella skipper he no die. Five fella, six fella white man no die. Skipper he sing out. Some fella white man he fight. Some fella white man he lower away boat. After that, all together over the side they go. Skipper he sling white Mary down. After that they washee (row) strong fella plenty too much. Father belong me, that time he

strong fella. He throw 'm one fella spear. That fella spear he go in one side that white Mary. He no stop. My word, he go out other side that fella Mary. She finish. Me no fright. Plenty kanaka too much no fright."

Old Oti's pride had been touched, for he suddenly stripped down his lava-lava and showed me the unmistakable scar of a bullet. Before I could speak, his line ran out suddenly. He checked it and attempted to haul in, but found that the fish had run around a coral branch. Casting a look of reproach at me for having beguiled him from his watchfulness, he went over the side, feet first, turning over after he got under and following his line down to bottom. The water was ten fathoms. I leaned over and watched the play of his feet, growing dim and dimmer, as they stirred the wan phosphorescence into ghostly fires. Ten fathoms--sixty feet--it was nothing to him, an old man, compared with the value of a hook and line. After what seemed five minutes, though it could not have been more than a minute, I saw him flaming whitely upward. He broke surface and dropped a ten pound rock cod into the canoe, the line and hook intact, the latter still fast in the fish's mouth.

"It may be," I said remorselessly. "You no fright long ago. You plenty fright now along that fella trader."

"Yes, plenty fright," he confessed, with an air of dismissing the subject. For half an hour we pulled up our lines and flung them out in silence. Then small fish-sharks began to bite, and after losing a hook apiece, we hauled in and waited for the sharks to go their way.

"I speak you true," Oti broke into speech, "then you savve we fright now."

I lighted up my pipe and waited, and the story that Oti told me in atrocious bech-de-mer I here turn into proper English. Otherwise, in spirit and order of narrative, the tale is as it fell from Oti's lips.

"It was after that that we were very proud. We had fought many times with the strange white men who live upon the sea, and always we had beaten them. A few of us were killed, but what was that compared with the stores of wealth of a thousand thousand kinds that we found on the ships? And then one day, maybe twenty years ago, or twenty-five, there came a schooner right through the passage and into the lagoon. It was a large schooner with three masts. She had five white men and maybe forty boat's crew, black fellows from New Guinea and New Britain; and she had come to fish beche-de-mer. She lay at anchor across the lagoon from here, at Pauloo, and her boats scattered out everywhere, making camps on the beaches where they cured the beche-de-mer. This made them weak by dividing them, for those who fished here and those on the schooner at Pauloo were fifty miles apart, and there were others farther away still.

"Our king and headmen held council, and I was one in the canoe that paddled all afternoon and all night across the lagoon, bringing word to the people of Pauloo that in the morning we would attack the fishing camps at the one time and that it was for them to take the schooner. We who brought the word were tired with the paddling, but we took part in the attack. On the schooner were two white men, the skipper and the second mate, with half a dozen black boys. The skipper with three boys we caught on shore and killed, but first eight of us

the skipper killed with his two revolvers. We fought close together, you see, at hand grapples.

"The noise of our fighting told the mate what was happening, and he put food and water and a sail in the small dingy, which was so small that it was no more than twelve feet long. We came down upon the schooner, a thousand men, covering the lagoon with our canoes. Also, we were blowing conch shells, singing war songs, and striking the sides of the canoes with our paddles. What chance had one white man and three black boys against us? No chance at all, and the mate knew it.

"White men are hell. I have watched them much, and I am an old man now, and I understand at last why the white men have taken to themselves all the islands in the sea. It is because they are hell. Here are you in the canoe with me. You are hardly more than a boy. You are not wise, for each day I tell you many things you do not know. When I was a little pickaninny, I knew more about fish and the ways of fish than you know now. I am an old man, but I swim down to the bottom of the lagoon, and you cannot follow me. What are you good for, anyway? I do not know, except to fight. I have never seen you fight, yet I know that you are like your brothers and that you will fight like hell. Also, you are a fool, like your brothers. You do not know when you are beaten. You will fight until you die, and then it will be too late to know that you are beaten.

"Now behold what this mate did. As we came down upon him, covering the sea and blowing our conches, he put off from the schooner in the small boat, along with the three black boys, and rowed for the passage. There again he was a fool, for no wise man would put out to sea in so small a boat. The sides of it were not four inches above the water. Twenty canoes went after him, filled with two hundred young men. We paddled five fathoms while his black boys were rowing one fathom. He had no chance, but he was a fool. He stood up in the boat with a rifle, and he shot many times. He was not a good shot, but as we drew close many of us were wounded and killed. But still he had no chance.

"I remember that all the time he was smoking a cigar. When we were forty feet away and coming fast, he dropped the rifle, lighted a stick of dynamite with the cigar, and threw it at us. He lighted another and another, and threw them at us very rapidly, many of them. I know now that he must have split the ends of the fuses and stuck in match heads, because they lighted so quickly. Also, the fuses were very short. Sometimes the dynamite sticks went off in the air, but most of them went off in the canoes. And each time they went off in a canoe, that canoe was finished. Of the twenty canoes, the half were smashed to pieces. The canoe I was in was so smashed, and likewise the two men who sat next to me. The dynamite fell between them. The other canoes turned and ran away. Then that mate yelled, 'Yah! Yah! Yah!' at us. Also he went at us again with his rifle, so that many were killed through the back as they fled away. And all the time the black boys in the boat went on rowing. You see, I told you true, that mate was hell.

"Nor was that all. Before he left the schooner, he set her on fire, and fixed up all the powder and dynamite so that it would go off at one time. There were hundreds of us on board, trying to put out the fire, heaving up water from overside, when the schooner blew up. So that all we had fought for was lost to us, besides many more of us being killed. Sometimes, even now, in my old age, I have bad dreams in

which I hear that mate yell, Yah! Yah! Yah!' In a voice of thunder he yells, Yah! Yah! Yah!' But all those in the fishing camps were killed.

"The mate went out of the passage in his little boat, and that was the end of him we made sure, for how could so small a boat, with four men in it, live on the ocean? A month went by, and then, one morning, between two rain squalls, a schooner sailed in through our passage and dropped anchor before the village. The king and the headmen made big talk, and it was agreed that we would take the schooner in two or three days. In the meantime, as it was our custom always to appear friendly, we went off to her in canoes, bringing strings of cocoanuts, fowls, and pigs, to trade. But when we were alongside, many canoes of us, the men on board began to shoot us with rifles, and as we paddled away I saw the mate who had gone to sea in the little boat spring upon the rail and dance and yell, Yah! Yah! Yah!'

"That afternoon they landed from the schooner in three small boats filled with white men. They went right through the village, shooting every man they saw. Also they shot the fowls and pigs. We who were not killed got away in canoes and paddled out into the lagoon. Looking back, we could see all the houses on fire. Late in the afternoon we saw many canoes coming from Nihi, which is the village near the Nihi Passage in the northeast. They were all that were left, and like us their village had been burned by a second schooner that had come through Nihi Passage.

"We stood on in the darkness to the westward for Pauloo, but in the middle of the night we heard women wailing and then we ran into a big fleet of canoes. They were all that were left of Pauloo, which likewise was in ashes, for a third schooner had come in through the Pauloo Passage. You see, that mate, with his black boys, had not been drowned. He had made the Solomon Islands, and there told his brothers of what we had done in Oolong. And all his brothers had said they would come and punish us, and there they were in the three schooners, and our three villages were wiped out.

"And what was there for us to do? In the morning the two schooners from windward sailed down upon us in the middle of the lagoon. The trade wind was blowing fresh, and by scores of canoes they ran us down. And the rifles never ceased talking. We scattered like flying fish before the bonita, and there were so many of us that we escaped by thousands, this way and that, to the islands on the rim of the atoll.

"And thereafter the schooners hunted us up and down the lagoon. In the nighttime we slipped past them. But the next day, or in two days or three days, the schooners would be coming back, hunting us toward the other end of the lagoon. And so it went. We no longer counted nor remembered our dead. True, we were many and they were few. But what could we do? I was in one of the twenty canoes filled with men who were not afraid to die. We attacked the smallest schooner. They shot us down in heaps. They threw dynamite into the canoes, and when the dynamite gave out, they threw hot water down upon us. And the rifles never ceased talking. And those whose canoes were smashed were shot as they swam away. And the mate danced up and down upon the cabin top and yelled, "Yah! Yah! Yah!"

"Every house on every smallest island was burned. Not a pig nor a fowl was left alive. Our wells were defiled with the bodies of the slain,

or else heaped high with coral rock. We were twenty-five thousand on Oolong before the three schooners came. Today we are five thousand. After the schooners left, we were but three thousand, as you shall see.

"At last the three schooners grew tired of chasing us back and forth. So they went, the three of them, to Nihi, in the northeast. And then they drove us steadily to the west. Their nine boats were in the water as well. They beat up every island as they moved along. They drove us, drove us, drove us day by day. And every night the three schooners and the nine boats made a chain of watchfulness that stretched across the lagoon from rim to rim, so that we could not escape back.

"They could not drive us forever that way, for the lagoon was only so large, and at last all of us that yet lived were driven upon the last sand bank to the west. Beyond lay the open sea. There were ten thousand of us, and we covered the sand bank from the lagoon edge to the pounding surf on the other side. No one could lie down. There was no room. We stood hip to hip and shoulder to shoulder. Two days they kept us there, and the mate would climb up in the rigging to mock us and yell, Yah! Yah! Yah! till we were well sorry that we had ever harmed him or his schooner a month before. We had no food, and we stood on our feet two days and nights. The little babies died, and the old and weak died, and the wounded died. And worst of all, we had no water to quench our thirst, and for two days the sun beat down on us, and there was no shade. Many men and women waded out into the ocean and were drowned, the surf casting their bodies back on the beach. And there came a pest of flies. Some men swam to the sides of the schooners, but they were shot to the last one. And we that lived were very sorry that in our pride we tried to take the schooner with the three masts that came to fish for beche-de-mer.

"On the morning of the third day came the skippers of the three schooners and that mate in a small boat. They carried rifles, all of them, and revolvers, and they made talk. It was only that they were weary of killing us that they had stopped, they told us. And we told them that we were sorry, that never again would we harm a white man, and in token of our submission we poured sand upon our heads. And all the women and children set up a great wailing for water, so that for some time no man could make himself heard. Then we were told our punishment. We must fill the three schooners with copra and beche-de-mer. And we agreed, for we wanted water, and our hearts were broken, and we knew that we were children at fighting when we fought with white men who fight like hell. And when all the talk was finished, the mate stood up and mocked us, and yelled, Yah! Yah! Yah! After that we paddled away in our canoes and sought water.

"And for weeks we toiled at catching beche-de-mer and curing it, in gathering the cocoanuts and turning them into copra. By day and night the smoke rose in clouds from all the beaches of all the islands of Oolong as we paid the penalty of our wrongdoing. For in those days of death it was burned clearly on all our brains that it was very wrong to harm a white man.

"By and by, the schooners full of copra and beche-de-mer and our trees empty of cocoanuts, the three skippers and that mate called us all together for a big talk. And they said they were very glad that we had learned our lesson, and we said for the ten-thousandth time that we were sorry and that we would not do it again. Also, we poured sand

upon our heads. Then the skippers said that it was all very well, but just to show us that they did not forget us, they would send a devil-devil that we would never forget and that we would always remember any time we might feel like harming a white man. After that the mate mocked us one more time and yelled, Yah! Yah! Yah! Then six of our men, whom we thought long dead, were put ashore from one of the schooners, and the schooners hoisted their sails and ran out through the passage for the Solomons.

"The six men who were put ashore were the first to catch the devil-devil the skippers sent back after us."

"A great sickness came," I interrupted, for I recognized the trick. The schooner had had measles on board, and the six prisoners had been deliberately exposed to it.

"Yes, a great sickness," Oti went on. "It was a powerful devil-devil. The oldest man had never heard of the like. Those of our priests that yet lived we killed because they could not overcome the devil-devil. The sickness spread. I have said that there were ten thousand of us that stood hip to hip and shoulder to shoulder on the sandbank. When the sickness left us, there were three thousand yet alive. Also, having made all our cocoanuts into copra, there was a famine.

"That fella trader," Oti concluded, "he like 'm that much dirt. He like 'm clam he die KAI-KAI (meat) he stop, stink 'm any amount. He like 'm one fella dog, one sick fella dog plenty fleas stop along him. We no fright along that fella trader. We fright because he white man. We savve plenty too much no good kill white man. That one fella sick dog trader he plenty brother stop along him, white men like 'm you fight like hell. We no fright that damn trader. Some time he made kanaka plenty cross along him and kanaka want 'm kill m, kanaka he think devil-devil and kanaka he hear that fella mate sing out, Yah! Yah! Yah!' and kanaka no kill 'm."

Oti baited his hook with a piece of squid, which he tore with his teeth from the live and squirming monster, and hook and bait sank in white flames to the bottom.

"Shark walk about he finish," he said. "I think we catch 'm plenty fella fish."

His line jerked savagely. He pulled it in rapidly, hand under hand, and landed a big gasping rock cod in the bottom of the canoe.

"Sun he come up, I make 'm that dam fella trader one present big fella fish," said Oti.

Cully

by Jack Egan, from *Amazing Stories January 1963**

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26751/26751-h/26751-h.htm>

By all the laws of nature, he should have been dead. But if he were alive ... then there was something he had to find.

Above him eighty feet of torpid, black water hung like a shroud of Death, and still he heard his ragged breathing. And something else. Cully concentrated on that sound, and the rhythmic pulsing of his heart. Somehow he had to retain a hold on his sanity ... or his soul.

After an hour of careful breathing and exploring of body sensations, Cully realized he could move. He flexed an arm; a mote of gold sand sifted upward in the dark water. It had a pleasant color, in contrast with the ominous shades of the sea. In a few moments, he had struggled to a sitting position, delighting in the curtain of glittering metal grains whirling around him as he moved.

And the other sound. A humming in his mind; a distant burble of tiny voices of other minds. Words swirling in giddy patterns he couldn't understand.

Shortly thereafter, Cully discovered why he still lived, breathed: a suit. A yellow, plastic, water-tight suit, with an orange-on-black shield on the left breast pocket, and a clear bubble-helmet. He felt weight on his back and examined it: two air tanks and their regulator, a radio, and ... the box.

Suit, tanks, regulator; radio, black water, box; sand, sea, stillness.

Cully considered his world. It was small; it was conceivable; it was incomplete.

Where is it?

"Where is what?" He knew he had a voice—a means of communication between others of his kind, using low-frequency heat waves caused by agitation of air molecules. Why couldn't he make it work?

Words. Thousands of them, at his beck and call. What were they? What did they mean? He shifted uncomfortably in the tight yellow suit, searching the near horizon for ...

Where is it?

A vague calling came from beyond the black sea curtain. Objectively, because he could do nothing to stop them, he watched his feet pick up, move forward, put down; pick up, move forward, put down. Funny. He had the feeling, the concept, that this action held meaning. It was supposed to cause some reaction, accomplish an act. He wondered at the regular movement of his legs. One of them hurt. A hurt is a sensation of pain, caused by over-loading sensory-units in the body; a hurt is bad, because it indicates something is wrong.

Something certainly was wrong. Something stirred in Cully's mind. He stopped and sat down on the sandy sea bottom, gracefully, like a ballet dancer. He examined his foot. There was a tiny hole in the yellow plastic fabric, and a thin string of red-black was oozing out. Blood. He knew.

He was bleeding. He could do nothing about it. He got up and resumed walking.

Where is it?

Cully lifted his head in annoyance at the sharp thought.

"Go away," he said in a low, pleading voice. The sound made him feel better. He began muttering to himself.

"Water, black, s-sand, hurt. Pain. Radio tanks ..."

It didn't sound right. After a few minutes, he was quiet. The manythoughts were calling him. He must go to the manythoughts.

If his foot was bleeding, then something had happened; if something had happened, then his foot was bleeding.

"No!"

If something had happened, then maybe other things had happened—before that. But how could something happen in a world of flat gold sand and flaccid sea? Surely there was something wrong. Wrong: the state of being not-right; something had happened that was not-right. Cully stared at the edges of the unmoving curtain before him.

Where is it?

It was a driving, promise-filled concept. No words; just the sense that something wonderful lay just beyond reach. But this voice was different from the manythoughts. It was directing his body; his mind was along for the ride.

The sameness of the sea and sand became unbearable. It was too-right, somehow. Cully felt anger, and kicked up eddies of dust. It changed the sameness a little. He kicked more up, until it swirled around him in a thick gold haze, blotting out the terrible emptiness of the sea.

He felt another weight at his side. He found a holster and gun. He recognized neither. Again he watched objectively as his hand pulled the black object out and handled it. His body was evidently familiar with it, though it was strange to his eyes. His finger slipped automatically into the trigger sheaf. His legs were still working under two drives: the manythoughts' urging, and something else, buried in him. A longing. Up-and-down, back-and-forth.

Where is it?

Anger, frustration flared in him. His hand shot out, gun at ready. He turned around slowly. Through the settling trail of suspended sand, nothing was visible.

Again he was moving. Something made his legs move. He walked on through the shrouds of Death until he felt a taut singing in his nerves. An irrational fear sprang out in him, cascading down his spine, and Cully shuddered. Ahead there was something. Two motives: get there because it (they?) calls; get there because you must.

Where is it?

The mind-voice was excited, demanding. Something was out there, besides the sameness. Cully walked on, trailing gold. The death-curtain parted ...

An undulating garden of blue-and-gold streamers suddenly drifted toward him on an unfelt current. Cully was held, entranced. They flowed before him, their colors dazzling, hypnotic.

Come closer, Earthling, the manythoughts spoke inside his head, soothingly.

Here it is! Cully's mind shouted.

Cully's mind was held, hypnotized, but his body moved of its own volition.

He moved again. His mind and the manythoughts' spoke: fulfillment—almost. There was one action left that must be completed.

Cully's arms moved. They detached the small black box from his pack. He moved on into the midst of the weaving, gold-laced plants. Little spicules licked out from their flexing stalks and jabbed, unsensed, into Cully's body to draw nourishment. From the manythoughts came the sense of complete fulfillment.

From Cully's mind came further orders.

Lie down. It was a collective concept. Lie still. We are friends.

He could not understand. They were speaking words; words were beyond him. His head shook in despair. The voices were implanting an emotion of horror at what his hands were doing, but he had no control over his body. It was as if it were not his.

The black box was now lying in the sand among the streaming plants. Cully's fingers reached out and caressed a small panel. A soundless 'click' ran through the murkiness. The strangely beautiful, gold-laced blue plants began a writhing dance. Their spicules withdrew and jabbed, withdrew and jabbed. A rending, silent scream tore the quiet waters.

NO! they cried. It was a negative command, mixed in with the terrible screaming. Turn it off!

"Stop it, stop it!" Cully tried to say, but there were no words. He tried to cover his ears within the helmet, but the cries went on. Emotions roiled the water: pain, hurt, reproach. Cully sobbed. Something was wrong here; something was killing the plants—the beautiful blue things! The plants were withering, dying. He looked up at them, stupefied, not understanding, tears streaming down his face. What did they want from him? What had he done ...

Where is it?

A different direction materialized; a new concept of desire.

Cully's body turned and crawled away from the wonderful, dying garden, oblivious to the pleadings floating, now weakly, in the torpid water. He scuffed up little motes of golden sand, leaving a low-lying scud along the bottom, back to the little black box in the garden. The plants, the box, all were forgotten by now. Cully crawled on, not knowing why. A rise appeared; surprise caught Cully unaware. A change in the sameness!

Where is it?

Again the voice was insistent. His desire was close ahead; he did not look back at the black churning on the sea bottom. His legs worked, his chest heaved, words swirled in his mind. He topped the rise.

Below him, in the center of a shallow golden bowl, floated a long, shiny cylinder. Even from here he knew it was huge. He knew other things about it: how heavy it was; how it was; that it carried others of his kind. He had been in it before. And they were waiting for him. He lurched on.

"Captain! Here comes Cully!" the midshipman shouted from the airlock. "Look what they've done to him!"

The old man's grey eyes took in the spectacle without visible emotion. He watched the pathetic, bleeding yellow plastic sack crawl up to the ship and look up. His hands reached down and lifted Cully up into the lock.

They took his suit off and stared with loathing at what had once been a man. A white scar zig-zagged across his forehead. The Captain bent close, in range of the dim blue eyes.

"It was a brave thing you did, Cully. The whole system will be grateful. Venus could never be colonized as long as those cannibals were there to eat men, and drive men mad." Cully fingered the scar on his forehead, and looked unseeing into the old man's compassionate eyes. "I'm sorry Cully. We all are. But there was no other way. Prefrontal lobotomy, destruction of your speech center ... it was the only way you could get past the telepaths and destroy them. I'm sorry, Cully. The race of Man shall long honor your name."

Cully smiled at the old man, the words churning in his brain; but he did not understand.

Where is it?

The emptiness was still there.

THE END

*Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from Amazing Stories January 1963. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

The Bookkeeper's Wife

by Willa Cather, from *A Collection of Stories, Reviews and Essays*
EBook #25586

Nobody but the janitor was stirring about the offices of the Remsen Paper Company, and still Percy Bixby sat at his desk, crouched on his high stool and staring out at the tops of the tall buildings flushed with the winter sunset, at the hundreds of windows, so many rectangles of white electric light, flashing against the broad waves of violet that ebbed across the sky. His ledgers were all in their places, his desk was in order, his office coat on its peg, and yet Percy's smooth, thin face wore the look of anxiety and strain which usually meant that he was behind in his work. He was trying to persuade himself to accept a loan from the company without the company's knowledge. As a matter of fact, he had already accepted it. His books were fixed, the money, in a black-leather bill-book, was already inside his waistcoat pocket.

He had still time to change his mind, to rectify the false figures in his ledger, and to tell Stella Brown that they couldn't possibly get married next month. There he always halted in his reasoning, and went back to the beginning.

The Remsen Paper Company was a very wealthy concern, with easy, old-fashioned working methods. They did a longtime credit business with safe customers, who never thought of paying up very close on their large indebtedness. From the payments on these large accounts Percy had taken a hundred dollars here and two hundred there until he had made up the thousand he needed. So long as he stayed by the books himself and attended to the mail-orders he couldn't possibly be found out. He could move these little shortages about from account to account indefinitely. He could have all the time he needed to pay back the deficit, and more time than he needed.

Although he was so far along in one course of action, his mind still clung resolutely to the other. He did not believe he was going to do it. He was the least of a sharper in the world. Being scrupulously honest even in the most trifling matters was a pleasure to him. He was the sort of young man that Socialists hate more than they hate capitalists. He loved his desk, he loved his books, which had no handwriting in them but his own. He never thought of resenting the fact that he had written away in those books the good red years between twenty-one and twenty-seven. He would have hated to let any one else put so much as a pen-scratch in them. He liked all the boys about the office; his desk, worn smooth by the sleeves of his alpaca coat; his rulers and inks and pens and calendars. He had a great pride in working economics, and he always got so far ahead when supplies were distributed that he had drawers full of pencils and pens and rubber bands against a rainy day.

Percy liked regularity: to get his work done on time, to have his half-day off every Saturday, to go to the theater Saturday night, to buy a new necktie twice a month, to appear in a new straw hat on the right day in May, and to know what was going on in New York. He read the morning and evening papers coming and going on the elevated, and preferred journals of approximate reliability. He got excited about ballgames and elections and business failures, was not above an

interest in murders and divorce scandals, and he checked the news off as neatly as he checked his mail-orders. In short, Percy Bixby was like the model pupil who is satisfied with his lessons and his teachers and his holidays, and who would gladly go to school all his life. He had never wanted anything outside his routine until he wanted Stella Brown to marry him, and that had upset everything.

It wasn't, he told himself for the hundredth time, that she was extravagant. Not a bit of it. She was like all girls. Moreover, she made good money, and why should she marry unless she could better herself? The trouble was that he had lied to her about his salary. There were a lot of fellows rushing Mrs. Brown's five daughters, and they all seemed to have fixed on Stella as first choice and this or that one of the sisters as second. Mrs. Brown thought it proper to drop an occasional hint in the presence of these young men to the effect that she expected Stella to "do well." It went without saying that hair and complexion like Stella's could scarcely be expected to do poorly. Most of the boys who went to the house and took the girls out in a bunch to dances and movies seemed to realize this. They merely wanted a whirl with Stella before they settled down to one of her sisters. It was tacitly understood that she came too high for them. Percy had sensed all this through those slumbering instincts which awake in us all to befriend us in love or in danger.

But there was one of his rivals, he knew, who was a man to be reckoned with. Charley Greengay was a young salesman who wore tailor-made clothes and spotted waistcoats, and had a necktie for every day in the month. His air was that of a young man who is out for things that come high and who is going to get them. Mrs. Brown was ever and again dropping a word before Percy about how the girl that took Charley would have her flat furnished by the best furniture people, and her china-closet stocked with the best ware, and would have nothing to worry about but nicks and scratches. It was because he felt himself pitted against this pulling power of Greengay's that Percy had brazenly lied to Mrs. Brown, and told her that his salary had been raised to fifty a week, and that now he wanted to get married.

When he threw out this challenge to Mother Brown, Percy was getting thirty-five dollars a week, and he knew well enough that there were several hundred thousand young men in New York who would do his work as well as he did for thirty.

These were the factors in Percy's present situation. He went over them again and again as he sat stooping on his tall stool. He had quite lost track of time when he heard the janitor call good night to the watchman. Without thinking what he was doing, he slid into his overcoat, caught his hat, and rushed out to the elevator, which was waiting for the janitor. The moment the car dropped, it occurred to him that the thing was decided without his having made up his mind at all. The familiar floors passed him, ten, nine, eight, seven. By the time he reached the fifth, there was no possibility of going back; the click of the drop-lever seemed to settle that. The money was in his pocket. Now, he told himself as he hurried out into the exciting clamor of the street, he was not going to worry about it any more.

* * * * *

When Percy reached the Browns' flat on 123d Street that evening he felt just the slightest chill in Stella's greeting. He could make that all right, he told himself, as he kissed her lightly in the dark three-by-four entrance-hall. Percy's courting had been prosecuted mainly in the Bronx or in winged pursuit of a Broadway car. When he entered the crowded sitting-room he greeted Mrs. Brown respectfully and the four girls playfully. They were all piled on one couch, reading the continued story in the evening paper, and they didn't think it necessary to assume more formal attitudes for Percy. They looked up over the smeary pink sheets of paper, and handed him, as Percy said, the same old jolly:

"Hullo, Perc'! Come to see me, ain't you? So flattered!"

"Any sweet goods on you, Perc'? Anything doing in the bong-bong line to-night?"

"Look at his new neckwear! Say, Perc', remember me. That tie would go lovely with my new tailored waist."

"Quit your kiddin', girls!" called Mrs. Brown, who was drying shirt-waists on the dining-room radiator. "And, Percy, mind the rugs when you're steppin' round among them gum-drops."

Percy fired his last shot at the recumbent figures, and followed Stella into the dining-room, where the table and two large easy-chairs formed, in Mrs. Brown's estimation, a proper background for a serious suitor.

"I say, Stell'," he began as he walked about the table with his hands in his pockets, "seems to me we ought to begin buying our stuff." She brightened perceptibly. "Ah," Percy thought, "so that was the trouble!" "To-morrow's Saturday; why can't we make an afternoon of it?" he went on cheerfully. "Shop till we're tired, then go to Houtin's for dinner, and end up at the theater."

As they bent over the lists she had made of things needed, Percy glanced at her face. She was very much out of her sisters' class and out of his, and he kept congratulating himself on his nerve. He was going in for something much too handsome and expensive and distinguished for him, he felt, and it took courage to be a plunger. To begin with, Stella was the sort of girl who had to be well dressed. She had pale primrose hair, with bluish tones in it, very soft and fine, so that it lay smooth however she dressed it, and pale-blue eyes, with blond eyebrows and long, dark lashes. She would have been a little too remote and languid even for the fastidious Percy had it not been for her hard, practical mouth, with lips that always kept their pink even when the rest of her face was pale. Her employers, who at first might be struck by her indifference, understood that anybody with that sort of mouth would get through the work.

After the shopping-lists had been gone over, Percy took up the question of the honeymoon. Stella said she had been thinking of Atlantic City. Percy met her with firmness. Whatever happened, he couldn't leave his books now.

"I want to do my traveling right here on Forty-second Street, with a high-price show every night," he declared. He made out an itinerary,

punctuated by theaters and restaurants, which Stella consented to accept as a substitute for Atlantic City.

"They give your fellows a week off when they're married, don't they?" she asked.

"Yes, but I'll want to drop into the office every morning to look after my mail. That's only businesslike."

"I'd like to have you treated as well as the others, though." Stella turned the rings about on her pale hand and looked at her polished finger-tips.

"I'll look out for that. What do you say to a little walk, Stell'?" Percy put the question coaxingly. When Stella was pleased with him she went to walk with him, since that was the only way in which Percy could ever see her alone. When she was displeased, she said she was too tired to go out. To-night she smiled at him incredulously, and went to put on her hat and gray fur piece.

Once they were outside, Percy turned into a shadowy side street that was only partly built up, a dreary waste of derricks and foundation holes, but comparatively solitary. Stella liked Percy's steady, sympathetic silences; she was not a chatterbox herself. She often wondered why she was going to marry Bixby instead of Charley Greengay. She knew that Charley would go further in the world. Indeed, she had often coolly told herself that Percy would never go very far. But, as she admitted with a shrug, she was "weak to Percy." In the capable New York stenographer, who estimated values coldly and got the most for the least outlay, there was something left that belonged to another kind of woman--something that liked the very things in Percy that were not good business assets. However much she dwelt upon the effectiveness of Greengay's dash and color and assurance, her mind always came back to Percy's neat little head, his clean-cut face, and warm, clear, gray eyes, and she liked them better than Charley's fullness and blurred floridness. Having reckoned up their respective chances with no doubtful result, she opposed a mild obstinacy to her own good sense. "I guess I'll take Percy, _anyway_," she said simply, and that was all the good her clever business brain did her.

* * * * *

Percy spent a night of torment, lying tense on his bed in the dark, and figuring out how long it would take him to pay back the money he was advancing to himself. Any fool could do it in five years, he reasoned, but he was going to do it in three. The trouble was that his expensive courtship had taken every penny of his salary. With competitors like Charley Greengay, you had to spend money or drop out. Certain birds, he reflected ruefully, are supplied with more attractive plumage when they are courting, but nature hadn't been so thoughtful for men. When Percy reached the office in the morning he climbed on his tall stool and leaned his arms on his ledger. He was so glad to feel it there that he was faint and weak-kneed.

* * * * *

Oliver Remsen, Junior, had brought new blood into the Remsen Paper Company. He married shortly after Percy Bixby did, and in the five

succeeding years he had considerably enlarged the company's business and profits. He had been particularly successful in encouraging efficiency and loyalty in the employees. From the time he came into the office he had stood for shorter hours, longer holidays, and a generous consideration of men's necessities. He came out of college on the wave of economic reform, and he continued to read and think a good deal about how the machinery of labor is operated. He knew more about the men who worked for him than their mere office records.

Young Remsen was troubled about Percy Bixby because he took no summer vacations--always asked for the two weeks' extra pay instead. Other men in the office had skipped a vacation now and then, but Percy had stuck to his desk for five years, had tottered to his stool through attacks of grippe and tonsillitis. He seemed to have grown fast to his ledger, and it was to this that Oliver objected. He liked his men to stay men, to look like men and live like men. He remembered how alert and wide-awake Bixby had seemed to him when he himself first came into the office. He had picked Bixby out as the most intelligent and interested of his father's employees, and since then had often wondered why he never seemed to see chances to forge ahead. Promotions, of course, went to the men who went after them. When Percy's baby died, he went to the funeral, and asked Percy to call on him if he needed money. Once when he chanced to sit down by Bixby on the elevated and found him reading Bryce's "American Commonwealth," he asked him to make use of his own large office library. Percy thanked him, but he never came for any books. Oliver wondered whether his bookkeeper really tried to avoid him.

One evening Oliver met the Bixbys in the lobby of a theater. He introduced Mrs. Remsen to them, and held them for some moments in conversation. When they got into their motor, Mrs. Remsen said:

"Is that little man afraid of you, Oliver? He looked like a scared rabbit."

Oliver snapped the door, and said with a shade of irritation:

"I don't know what's the matter with him. He's the fellow I've told you about who never takes a vacation. I half believe it's his wife. She looks pitiless enough for anything."

"She's very pretty of her kind," mused Mrs. Remsen, "but rather chilling. One can see that she has ideas about elegance."

"Rather unfortunate ones for a bookkeeper's wife. I surmise that Percy felt she was overdressed, and that made him awkward with me. I've always suspected that fellow of good taste."

After that, when Remsen passed the counting-room and saw Percy screwed up over his ledger, he often remembered Mrs. Bixby, with her cold, pale eyes and long lashes, and her expression that was something between indifference and discontent. She rose behind Percy's bent shoulders like an apparition.

One spring afternoon Remsen was closeted in his private office with his lawyer until a late hour. As he came down the long hall in the dusk he glanced through the glass partition into the counting-room, and saw Percy Bixby huddled up on his tall stool, though it was too dark to work. Indeed, Bixby's ledger was closed, and he sat with his

two arms resting on the brown cover. He did not move a muscle when young Remsen entered.

"You are late, Bixby, and so am I," Oliver began genially as he crossed to the front of the room and looked out at the lighted windows of other tall buildings. "The fact is, I've been doing something that men have a foolish way of putting off. I've been making my will."

"Yes, sir." Percy brought it out with a deep breath.

"Glad to be through with it," Oliver went on. "Mr. Melton will bring the paper back to-morrow, and I'd like to ask you to be one of the witnesses."

"I'd be very proud, Mr. Remsen."

"Thank you, Bixby. Good night." Remsen took up his hat just as Percy slid down from his stool.

"Mr. Remsen, I'm told you're going to have the books gone over."

"Why, yes, Bixby. Don't let that trouble you. I'm taking in a new partner, you know, an old college friend. Just because he is a friend, I insist upon all the usual formalities. But it is a formality, and I'll guarantee the expert won't make a scratch on your books. Good night. You'd better be coming, too." Remsen had reached the door when he heard "Mr. Remsen!" in a desperate voice behind him. He turned, and saw Bixby standing uncertainly at one end of the desk, his hand still on his ledger, his uneven shoulders drooping forward and his head hanging as if he were seasick. Remsen came back and stood at the other end of the long desk. It was too dark to see Bixby's face clearly.

"What is it, Bixby?"

"Mr. Remsen, five years ago, just before I was married, I falsified the books a thousand dollars, and I used the money." Percy leaned forward against his desk, which took him just across the chest.

"What's that, Bixby?" Young Remsen spoke in a tone of polite surprise. He felt painfully embarrassed.

"Yes, sir. I thought I'd get it all paid back before this. I've put back three hundred, but the books are still seven hundred out of true. I've played the shortages about from account to account these five years, but an expert would find 'em in twenty-four hours."

"I don't just understand how--" Oliver stopped and shook his head.

"I held it out of the Western remittances, Mr. Remsen. They were coming in heavy just then. I was up against it. I hadn't saved anything to marry on, and my wife thought I was getting more money than I was. Since we've been married, I've never had the nerve to tell her. I could have paid it all back if it hadn't been for the unforeseen expenses."

Remsen sighed.

"Being married is largely unforeseen expenses, Percy. There's only one way to fix this up: I'll give you seven hundred dollars in cash to-morrow, and you can give me your personal note, with the understanding that I hold ten dollars a week out of your pay-check until it is paid. I think you ought to tell your wife exactly how you are fixed, though. You can't expect her to help you much when she doesn't know."

* * * * *

That night Mrs. Bixby was sitting in their flat, waiting for her husband. She was dressed for a bridge party, and often looked with impatience from her paper to the Mission clock, as big as a coffin and with nothing but two weights dangling in its hollow framework. Percy had been loath to buy the clock when they got their furniture, and he had hated it ever since. Stella had changed very little since she came into the flat a bride. Then she wore her hair in a Floradora pompadour; now she wore it hooded close about her head like a scarf, in a rather smeary manner, like an Impressionist's brush-work. She heard her husband come in and close the door softly. While he was taking off his hat in the narrow tunnel of a hall, she called to him:

"I hope you've had something to eat down-town. You'll have to dress right away." Percy came in and sat down. She looked up from the evening paper she was reading. "You've no time to sit down. We must start in fifteen minutes."

He shaded his eyes from the glaring overhead light.

"I'm afraid I can't go anywhere to-night. I'm all in."

Mrs. Bixby rattled her paper, and turned from the theatrical page to the fashions.

"You'll feel better after you dress. We won't stay late."

Her even persistence usually conquered her husband. She never forgot anything she had once decided to do. Her manner of following it up grew more chilly, but never weaker. To-night there was no spring in Percy. He closed his eyes and replied without moving:

"I can't go. You had better telephone the Burks we aren't coming. I have to tell you something disagreeable."

Stella rose.

"I certainly am not going to disappoint the Burks and stay at home to talk about anything disagreeable."

"You're not very sympathetic, Stella."

She turned away.

"If I were, you'd soon settle down into a pretty dull proposition. We'd have no social life now if I didn't keep at you."

Percy roused himself a little.

"Social life? Well, we'll have to trim that pretty close for a while. I'm in debt to the company. We've been living beyond our means ever since we were married."

"We can't live on less than we do," Stella said quietly. "No use in taking that up again."

Percy sat up, clutching the arms of his chair.

"We'll have to take it up. I'm seven hundred dollars short, and the books are to be audited to-morrow. I told young Remsen and he's going to take my note and hold the money out of my pay-checks. He could send me to jail, of course."

Stella turned and looked down at him with a gleam of interest.

"Oh, you've been playing solitaire with the books, have you? And he's found you out! I hope I'll never see that man again. Sugar face!" She said this with intense acrimony. Her forehead flushed delicately, and her eyes were full of hate. Young Remsen was not her idea of a "business man."

Stella went into the other room. When she came back she wore her evening coat and carried long gloves and a black scarf. This she began to arrange over her hair before the mirror above the false fireplace. Percy lay inert in the Morris chair and watched her. Yes, he understood; it was very difficult for a woman with hair like that to be shabby and to go without things. Her hair made her conspicuous, and it had to be lived up to. It had been the deciding factor in his fate.

Stella caught the lace over one ear with a large gold hairpin. She repeated this until she got a good effect. Then turning to Percy, she began to draw on her gloves.

"I'm not worrying any, because I'm going back into business," she said firmly. "I meant to, anyway, if you didn't get a raise the first of the year. I have the offer of a good position, and we can live in an apartment hotel."

Percy was on his feet in an instant.

"I won't have you grinding in any office. That's flat."

Stella's lower lip quivered in a commiserating smile. "Oh, I won't lose my health. Charley Greengay's a partner in his concern now, and he wants a private secretary."

Percy drew back.

"You can't work for Greengay. He's got too bad a reputation. You've more pride than that, Stella."

The thin sweep of color he knew so well went over Stella's face.

"His business reputation seems to be all right," she commented, working the kid on with her left hand.

"What if it is?" Percy broke out. "He's the cheapest kind of a

skate. He gets into scrapes with the girls in his own office. The last one got into the newspapers, and he had to pay the girl a wad."

"He don't get into scrapes with his books, anyway, and he seems to be able to stand getting into the papers. I excuse Charley. His wife's a pill."

"I suppose you think he'd have been all right if he'd married you," said Percy, bitterly.

"Yes, I do." Stella buttoned her glove with an air of finishing something, and then looked at Percy without animosity. "Charley and I both have sporty tastes, and we like excitement. You might as well live in Newark if you're going to sit at home in the evening. You oughtn't to have married a business woman; you need somebody domestic. There's nothing in this sort of life for either of us."

"That means, I suppose, that you're going around with Greengay and his crowd?"

"Yes, that's my sort of crowd, and you never did fit into it. You're too intellectual. I've always been proud of you, Percy. You're better style than Charley, but that gets tiresome. You will never burn much red fire in New York, now, will you?"

Percy did not reply. He sat looking at the minute-hand of the eviscerated Mission clock. His wife almost never took the trouble to argue with him.

"You're old style, Percy," she went on. "Of course everybody marries and wishes they hadn't, but nowadays people get over it. Some women go ahead on the quiet, but I'm giving it to you straight. I'm going to work for Greengay. I like his line of business, and I meet people well. Now I'm going to the Burks'."

Percy dropped his hands limply between his knees.

"I suppose," he brought out, "the real trouble is that you've decided my earning power is not very great."

"That's part of it, and part of it is you're old-fashioned." Stella paused at the door and looked back. "What made you rush me, anyway, Percy?" she asked indulgently. "What did you go and pretend to be a spender and get tied up with me for?"

"I guess everybody wants to be a spender when he's in love," Percy replied.

Stella shook her head mournfully.

"No, you're a spender or you're not. Greengay has been broke three times, fired, down and out, black-listed. But he's always come back, and he always will. You will never be fired, but you'll always be poor." She turned and looked back again before she went out.

* * * * *

Six months later Bixby came to young Oliver Remsen one afternoon and said he would like to have twenty dollars a week held out of his pay

until his debt was cleared off.

Oliver looked up at his sallow employee and asked him how he could spare as much as that.

"My expenses are lighter," Bixby replied. "My wife has gone into business with a ready-to-wear firm. She is not living with me any more."

Oliver looked annoyed, and asked him if nothing could be done to readjust his domestic affairs. Bixby said no; they would probably remain as they were.

"But where are you living, Bixby? How have you arranged things?" the young man asked impatiently.

"I'm very comfortable. I live in a boarding-house and have my own furniture. There are several fellows there who are fixed the same way. Their wives went back into business, and they drifted apart."

With a baffled expression Remsen stared at the uneven shoulders under the skin-fitting alpaca desk coat as his bookkeeper went out. He had meant to do something for Percy, but somehow, he reflected, one never did do anything for a fellow who had been stung as hard as that.

Century, May 1916

The Romance of an Ugly Policeman

by P. G. Wodehouse, from *The Man With Two Left Feet*
EBook #7471

Crossing the Thames by Chelsea Bridge, the wanderer through London finds himself in pleasant Battersea. Rounding the Park, where the female of the species wanders with its young by the ornamental water where the wild-fowl are, he comes upon a vast road. One side of this is given up to Nature, the other to Intellect. On the right, green trees stretch into the middle distance; on the left, endless blocks of residential flats. It is Battersea Park Road, the home of the cliff-dwellers.

Police-constable Plimmer's beat embraced the first quarter of a mile of the cliffs. It was his duty to pace in the measured fashion of the London policeman along the front of them, turn to the right, turn to the left, and come back along the road which ran behind them. In this way he was enabled to keep the king's peace over no fewer than four blocks of mansions.

It did not require a deal of keeping. Battersea may have its tough citizens, but they do not live in Battersea Park Road. Battersea Park Road's speciality is Brain, not Crime. Authors, musicians, newspaper men, actors, and artists are the inhabitants of these mansions. A child could control them. They assault and batter nothing but pianos; they steal nothing but ideas; they murder nobody except Chopin and Beethoven. Not through these shall an ambitious young constable achieve promotion.

At this conclusion Edward Plimmer arrived within forty-eight hours of his installation. He recognized the flats for what they were--just so many layers of big-brained blamelessness. And there was not even the chance of a burglary. No burglar wastes his time burgling authors. Constable Plimmer reconciled his mind to the fact that his term in Battersea must be looked on as something in the nature of a vacation.

He was not altogether sorry. At first, indeed, he found the new atmosphere soothing. His last beat had been in the heart of tempestuous Whitechapel, where his arms had ached from the incessant hauling of wiry inebriates to the station, and his shins had revolted at the kicks showered upon them by haughty spirits impatient of restraint. Also, one Saturday night, three friends of a gentleman whom he was trying to induce not to murder his wife had so wrought upon him that, when he came out of hospital, his already homely appearance was further marred by a nose which resembled the gnarled root of a tree. All these things had taken from the charm of Whitechapel, and the cloistral peace of Battersea Park Road was grateful and comforting.

And just when the unbroken calm had begun to lose its attraction and dreams of action were once more troubling him, a new interest entered his life; and with its coming he ceased to wish to be removed from Battersea. He fell in love.

It happened at the back of York Mansions. Anything that ever happened, happened there; for it is at the back of these blocks of flats that the real life is. At the front you never see anything, except an occasional tousle-headed young man smoking a pipe; but at the back, where the cooks come out to parley with the tradesmen, there is at certain hours

of the day quite a respectable activity. Pointed dialogues about yesterday's eggs and the toughness of Saturday's meat are conducted fortissimo between cheerful youths in the road and satirical young women in print dresses, who come out of their kitchen doors on to little balconies. The whole thing has a pleasing Romeo and Juliet touch. Romeo rattles up in his cart. 'Sixty-four!' he cries. 'Sixty-fower, sixty-fower, sixty-fow--' The kitchen door opens, and Juliet emerges. She eyes Romeo without any great show of affection. 'Are you Perkins and Blissett?' she inquires coldly. Romeo admits it. 'Two of them yesterday's eggs was bad.' Romeo protests. He defends his eggs. They were fresh from the hen; he stood over her while she laid them. Juliet listens frigidly. 'I _don't_ think,' she says. 'Well, half of sugar, one marmalade, and two of breakfast bacon,' she adds, and ends the argument. There is a rattling as of a steamer weighing anchor; the goods go up in the tradesman's lift; Juliet collects them, and exits, banging the door. The little drama is over.

Such is life at the back of York Mansions--a busy, throbbing thing.

The peace of afternoon had fallen upon the world one day towards the end of Constable Plimmer's second week of the simple life, when his attention was attracted by a whistle. It was followed by a musical 'Hi!'

Constable Plimmer looked up. On the kitchen balcony of a second-floor flat a girl was standing. As he took her in with a slow and exhaustive gaze, he was aware of strange thrills. There was something about this girl which excited Constable Plimmer. I do not say that she was a beauty; I do not claim that you or I would have raved about her; I merely say that Constable Plimmer thought she was All Right.

'Miss?' he said.

'Got the time about you?' said the girl. 'All the clocks have stopped.'

'The time,' said Constable Plimmer, consulting his watch, 'wants exactly ten minutes to four.'

'Thanks.'

'Not at all, miss.'

The girl was inclined for conversation. It was that gracious hour of the day when you have cleared lunch and haven't got to think of dinner yet, and have a bit of time to draw a breath or two. She leaned over the balcony and smiled pleasantly.

'If you want to know the time, ask a pleeceman,' she said. 'You been on this beat long?'

'Just short of two weeks, miss.'

'I been here three days.'

'I hope you like it, miss.'

'So-so. The milkman's a nice boy.'

Constable Plimmer did not reply. He was busy silently hating the

milkman. He knew him--one of those good-looking blighters; one of those oiled and curled perishers; one of those blooming fascinators who go about the world making things hard for ugly, honest men with loving hearts. Oh, yes, he knew the milkman.

'He's a rare one with his jokes,' said the girl.

Constable Plimmer went on not replying. He was perfectly aware that the milkman was a rare one with his jokes. He had heard him. The way girls fell for anyone with the gift of the gab--that was what embittered Constable Plimmer.

'He--' she giggled. 'He calls me Little Pansy-Face.'

'If you'll excuse me, miss,' said Constable Plimmer coldly, 'I'll have to be getting along on my beat.'

Little Pansy-Face! And you couldn't arrest him for it! What a world! Constable Plimmer paced upon his way, a blue-clad volcano.

It is a terrible thing to be obsessed by a milkman. To Constable Plimmer's disordered imagination it seemed that, dating from this interview, the world became one solid milkman. Wherever he went, he seemed to run into this milkman. If he was in the front road, this milkman--Alf Brooks, it appeared, was his loathsome name--came rattling past with his jingling cans as if he were Apollo driving his chariot. If he was round at the back, there was Alf, his damned tenor doing duets with the balconies. And all this in defiance of the known law of natural history that milkmen do not come out after five in the morning. This irritated Constable Plimmer. You talk of a man 'going home with the milk' when you mean that he sneaks in in the small hours of the morning. If all milkmen were like Alf Brooks the phrase was meaningless.

He brooded. The unfairness of Fate was souring him. A man expects trouble in his affairs of the heart from soldiers and sailors, and to be cut out by even a postman is to fall before a worthy foe; but milkmen--no! Only grocers' assistants and telegraph-boys were intended by Providence to fear milkmen.

Yet here was Alf Brooks, contrary to all rules, the established pet of the mansions. Bright eyes shone from balconies when his 'Milk--oo--oo' sounded. Golden voices giggled delightedly at his bellowed chaff. And Ellen Brown, whom he called Little Pansy-Face, was definitely in love with him.

They were keeping company. They were walking out. This crushing truth Edward Plimmer learned from Ellen herself.

She had slipped out to mail a letter at the pillar-box on the corner, and she reached it just as the policeman arrived there in the course of his patrol.

Nervousness impelled Constable Plimmer to be arch.

'Ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo,' he said. 'Posting love-letters?'

'What, me? This is to the Police Commissioner, telling him you're no good.'

'I'll give it to him. Him and me are taking supper tonight.'

Nature had never intended Constable Plimmer to be playful. He was at his worst when he rollicked. He snatched at the letter with what was meant to be a debonair gaiety, and only succeeded in looking like an angry gorilla. The girl uttered a startled squeak.

The letter was addressed to Mr A. Brooks.

Playfulness, after this, was at a discount. The girl was frightened and angry, and he was scowling with mingled jealousy and dismay.

'Ho!' he said. 'Ho! Mr A. Brooks!'

Ellen Brown was a nice girl, but she had a temper, and there were moments when her manners lacked rather noticeably the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

'Well, what about it?' she cried. 'Can't one write to the young gentleman one's keeping company with, without having to get permission from every--' She paused to marshal her forces from the assault. 'Without having to get permission from every great, ugly, red-faced copper with big feet and a broken nose in London?'

Constable Plimmer's wrath faded into a dull unhappiness. Yes, she was right. That was the correct description. That was how an impartial Scotland Yard would be compelled to describe him, if ever he got lost. 'Missing. A great, ugly, red-faced copper with big feet and a broken nose.' They would never find him otherwise.

'Perhaps you object to my walking out with Alf? Perhaps you've got something against him? I suppose you're jealous!'

She threw in the last suggestion entirely in a sporting spirit. She loved battle, and she had a feeling that this one was going to finish far too quickly. To prolong it, she gave him this opening. There were a dozen ways in which he might answer, each more insulting than the last; and then, when he had finished, she could begin again. These little encounters, she held, sharpened the wits, stimulated the circulation, and kept one out in the open air.

'Yes,' said Constable Plimmer.

It was the one reply she was not expecting. For direct abuse, for sarcasm, for dignity, for almost any speech beginning, 'What! Jealous of you. Why--' she was prepared. But this was incredible. It disabled her, as the wild thrust of an unskilled fencer will disable a master of the rapier. She searched in her mind and found that she had nothing to say.

There was a tense moment in which she found him, looking her in the eyes, strangely less ugly than she had supposed, and then he was gone, rolling along on his beat with that air which all policemen must achieve, of having no feelings at all, and--as long as it behaves itself--no interest in the human race.

Ellen posted her letter. She dropped it into the box thoughtfully, and thoughtfully returned to the flat. She looked over her shoulder, but

Constable Plimmer was out of sight.

Peaceful Battersea began to vex Constable Plimmer. To a man crossed in love, action is the one anodyne; and Battersea gave no scope for action. He dreamed now of the old Whitechapel days as a man dreams of the joys of his childhood. He reflected bitterly that a fellow never knows when he is well off in this world. Any one of those myriad drunk and disorderlies would have been as balm to him now. He was like a man who has run through a fortune and in poverty eats the bread of regret. Amazingly he recollected that in those happy days he had grumbled at his lot. He remembered confiding to a friend in the station-house, as he rubbed with liniment the spot on his right shin where the well-shod foot of a joyous costermonger had got home, that this sort of thing--meaning militant costermongers--was 'a bit too thick'. A bit too thick! Why, he would pay one to kick him now. And as for the three loyal friends of the would-be wife-murderer who had broken his nose, if he saw them coming round the corner he would welcome them as brothers.

And Battersea Park Road dozed on--calm, intellectual, law-abiding.

A friend of his told him that there had once been a murder in one of these flats. He did not believe it. If any of these white-corpuscled clams ever swatted a fly, it was much as they could do. The thing was ridiculous on the face of it. If they were capable of murder, they would have murdered Alf Brooks.

He stood in the road, and looked up at the placid buildings resentfully.

'Grr-rr-rr!' he growled, and kicked the side-walk.

And, even as he spoke, on the balcony of a second-floor flat there appeared a woman, an elderly, sharp-faced woman, who waved her arms and screamed, 'Policeman! Officer! Come up here! Come up here at once!'

Up the stone stairs went Constable Plimmer at the run. His mind was alert and questioning. Murder? Hardly murder, perhaps. If it had been that, the woman would have said so. She did not look the sort of woman who would be reticent about a thing like that. Well, anyway, it was something; and Edward Plimmer had been long enough in Battersea to be thankful for small favours. An intoxicated husband would be better than nothing. At least he would be something that a fellow could get his hands on to and throw about a bit.

The sharp-faced woman was waiting for him at the door. He followed her into the flat.

'What is it, ma'am?'

'Theft! Our cook has been stealing!'

She seemed sufficiently excited about it, but Constable Plimmer felt only depression and disappointment. A stout admirer of the sex, he hated arresting women. Moreover, to a man in the mood to tackle anarchists with bombs, to be confronted with petty theft is galling. But duty was duty. He produced his notebook.

'She is in her room. I locked her in. I know she has taken my brooch. We have missed money. You must search her.'

'Can't do that, ma'am. Female searcher at the station.'

'Well, you can search her box.'

A little, bald, nervous man in spectacles appeared as if out of a trap. As a matter of fact, he had been there all the time, standing by the bookcase; but he was one of those men you do not notice till they move and speak.

'Er--Jane.'

'Well, Henry?'

The little man seemed to swallow something.

'I--I think that you may possibly be wronging Ellen. It is just possible, as regards the money--' He smiled in a ghastly manner and turned to the policeman. 'Er--officer, I ought to tell you that my wife--ah--holds the purse-strings of our little home; and it is just possible that in an absent-minded moment _I_ may have--'

'Do you mean to tell me, Henry, that _you_ have been taking my money?'

'My dear, it is just possible that in the abs--'

'How often?'

He wavered perceptibly. Conscience was beginning to lose its grip.

'Oh, not often.'

'How often? More than once?'

Conscience had shot its bolt. The little man gave up the Struggle.

'No, no, not more than once. Certainly not more than once.'

'You ought not to have done it at all. We will talk about that later. It doesn't alter the fact that Ellen is a thief. I have missed money half a dozen times. Besides that, there's the brooch. Step this way, officer.'

Constable Plimmer stepped that way--his face a mask. He knew who was waiting for them behind the locked door at the end of the passage. But it was his duty to look as if he were stuffed, and he did so.

* * * * *

She was sitting on her bed, dressed for the street. It was her afternoon out, the sharp-faced woman had informed Constable Plimmer, attributing the fact that she had discovered the loss of the brooch in time to stop her a direct interposition of Providence. She was pale, and there was a hunted look in her eyes.

'You wicked girl, where is my brooch?'

She held it out without a word. She had been holding it in her hand.

'You see, officer!'

'I wasn't stealing of it. I 'adn't but borrowed it. I was going to put it back.'

'Stuff and nonsense! Borrow it, indeed! What for?'

'I--I wanted to look nice.'

The woman gave a short laugh. Constable Plimmer's face was a mere block of wood, expressionless.

'And what about the money I've been missing? I suppose you'll say you only borrowed that?'

'I never took no money.'

'Well, it's gone, and money doesn't go by itself. Take her to the police-station, officer.'

Constable Plimmer raised heavy eyes.

'You make a charge, ma'am?'

'Bless the man! Of course I make a charge. What did you think I asked you to step in for?'

'Will you come along, miss?' said Constable Plimmer.

* * * * *

Out in the street the sun shone gaily down on peaceful Battersea. It was the hour when children walk abroad with their nurses; and from the green depths of the Park came the sound of happy voices. A cat stretched itself in the sunshine and eyed the two as they passed with lazy content.

They walked in silence. Constable Plimmer was a man with a rigid sense of what was and what was not fitting behaviour in a policeman on duty: he aimed always at a machine-like impersonality. There were times when it came hard, but he did his best. He strode on, his chin up and his eyes averted. And beside him--

Well, she was not crying. That was something.

Round the corner, beautiful in light flannel, gay at both ends with a new straw hat and the yellowest shoes in South-West London, scented, curled, a prince among young men, stood Alf Brooks. He was feeling piqued. When he said three o'clock, he meant three o'clock. It was now three-fifteen, and she had not appeared. Alf Brooks swore an impatient oath, and the thought crossed his mind, as it had sometimes crossed it before, that Ellen Brown was not the only girl in the world.

'Give her another five min--'

Ellen Brown, with escort, at that moment turned the corner.

Rage was the first emotion which the spectacle aroused in Alf Brooks.

Girls who kept a fellow waiting about while they fooled around with policemen were no girls for him. They could understand once and for all that he was a man who could pick and choose.

And then an electric shock set the world dancing mistily before his eyes. This policeman was wearing his belt; he was on duty. And Ellen's face was not the face of a girl strolling with the Force for pleasure.

His heart stopped, and then began to race. His cheeks flushed a dusky crimson. His jaw fell, and a prickly warmth glowed in the parts about his spine.

'Goo!'

His fingers sought his collar.

'Crumbs!'

He was hot all over.

'Goo' Lor! She's been pinched!'

He tugged at his collar. It was choking him.

Alf Brooks did not show up well in the first real crisis which life had forced upon him. That must be admitted. Later, when it was over, and he had leisure for self-examination, he admitted it to himself. But even then he excused himself by asking Space in a blustering manner what else he could ha' done. And if the question did not bring much balm to his soul at the first time of asking, it proved wonderfully soothing on constant repetition. He repeated it at intervals for the next two days, and by the end of that time his cure was complete. On the third morning his 'Milk--oo--oo' had regained its customary carefree ring, and he was feeling that he had acted in difficult circumstances in the only possible manner.

Consider. He was Alf Brooks, well known and respected in the neighbourhood; a singer in the choir on Sundays; owner of a milk-walk in the most fashionable part of Battersea; to all practical purposes a public man. Was he to recognize, in broad daylight and in open street, a girl who walked with a policeman because she had to, a malefactor, a girl who had been pinched?

Ellen, Constable Plimmer woodenly at her side, came towards him. She was ten yards off--seven--five--three--Alf Brooks tilted his hat over his eyes and walked past her, unseeing, a stranger.

He hurried on. He was conscious of a curious feeling that somebody was just going to kick him, but he dared not look round.

* * * * *

Constable Plimmer eyed the middle distance with an earnest gaze. His face was redder than ever. Beneath his blue tunic strange emotions were at work. Something seemed to be filling his throat. He tried to swallow it.

He stopped in his stride. The girl glanced up at him in a kind of dull, questioning way. Their eyes met for the first time that afternoon, and

it seemed to Constable Plimmer that whatever it was that was interfering with the inside of his throat had grown larger, and more unmanageable.

There was the misery of the stricken animal in her gaze. He had seen women look like that in Whitechapel. The woman to whom, indirectly, he owed his broken nose had looked like that. As his hand had fallen on the collar of the man who was kicking her to death, he had seen her eyes. They were Ellen's eyes, as she stood there now--tortured, crushed, yet uncomplaining.

Constable Plimmer looked at Ellen, and Ellen looked at Constable Plimmer. Down the street some children were playing with a dog. In one of the flats a woman began to sing.

'Hop it,' said Constable Plimmer.

He spoke gruffly. He found speech difficult.

The girl started.

'What say?'

'Hop it. Get along. Run away.'

'What do you mean?'

Constable Plimmer scowled. His face was scarlet. His jaw protruded like a granite break-water.

'Go on,' he growled. 'Hop it. Tell him it was all a joke. I'll explain at the station.'

Understanding seemed to come to her slowly.

'Do you mean I'm to go?'

'Yes.'

'What do you mean? You aren't going to take me to the station?'

'No.'

She stared at him. Then, suddenly, she broke down,

'He wouldn't look at me. He was ashamed of me. He pretended not to see me.'

She leaned against the wall, her back shaking.

'Well, run after him, and tell him it was all--'

'No, no, no.'

Constable Plimmer looked morosely at the side-walk. He kicked it.

She turned. Her eyes were red, but she was no longer crying. Her chin had a brave tilt.

'I couldn't--not after what he did. Let's go along. I--I don't care.'

She looked at him curiously.

'Were you really going to have let me go?'

Constable Plimmer nodded. He was aware of her eyes searching his face, but he did not meet them.

'Why?'

He did not answer.

'What would have happened to you, if you had have done?'

Constable Plimmer's scowl was of the stuff of which nightmares are made. He kicked the unoffending side-walk with an increased viciousness.

'Dismissed the Force,' he said curtly.

'And sent to prison, too, I shouldn't wonder.'

'Maybe.'

He heard her draw a deep breath, and silence fell upon them again. The dog down the road had stopped barking. The woman in the flat had stopped singing. They were curiously alone.

'Would you have done all that for me?' she said.

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't think you ever did it. Stole that money, I mean. Nor the brooch, neither.'

'Was that all?'

'What do you mean--all?'

'Was that the only reason?'

He swung round on her, almost threateningly.

'No,' he said hoarsely. 'No, it wasn't, and you know it wasn't. Well, if you want it, you can have it. It was because I love you. There! Now I've said it, and now you can go on and laugh at me as much as you want.'

'I'm not laughing,' she said soberly.

'You think I'm a fool!'

'No, I don't.'

'I'm nothing to you. _He's_ the fellow you're stuck on.'

She gave a little shudder.

'No.'

'What do you mean?'

'I've changed.' She paused. 'I think I shall have changed more by the time I come out.'

'Come out?'

'Come out of prison.'

'You're not going to prison.'

'Yes, I am.'

'I won't take you.'

'Yes, you will. Think I'm going to let you get yourself in trouble like that, to get me out of a fix? Not much.'

'You hop it, like a good girl.'

'Not me.'

He stood looking at her like a puzzled bear.

'They can't eat me.'

'They'll cut off all of your hair.'

'D'you like my hair?'

'Yes.'

'Well, it'll grow again.'

'Don't stand talking. Hop it.'

'I won't. Where's the station?'

'Next street.'

'Well, come along, then.'

* * * * *

The blue glass lamp of the police-station came into sight, and for an instant she stopped. Then she was walking on again, her chin tilted. But her voice shook a little as she spoke.

'Nearly there. Next stop, Battersea. All change! I say, mister--I don't know your name.'

'Plimmer's my name, miss. Edward Plimmer.'

'I wonder if--I mean it'll be pretty lonely where I'm going--I wonder if--What I mean is, it would be rather a lark, when I come out, if I

was to find a pal waiting for me to say "Hallo".'

Constable Plimmer braced his ample feet against the stones, and turned purple.

'Miss,' he said, 'I'll be there, if I have to sit up all night. The first thing you'll see when they open the doors is a great, ugly, red-faced copper with big feet and a broken nose. And if you'll say "Hallo" to him when he says "Hallo" to you, he'll be as pleased as Punch and as proud as a duke. And, miss'--he clenched his hands till the nails hurt the leathern flesh--'and, miss, there's just one thing more I'd like to say. You'll be having a good deal of time to yourself for awhile; you'll be able to do a good bit of thinking without anyone to disturb you; and what I'd like you to give your mind to, if you don't object, is just to think whether you can't forget that narrow-chested, God-forsaken blighter who treated you so mean, and get half-way fond of someone who knows jolly well you're the only girl there is.'

She looked past him at the lamp which hung, blue and forbidding, over the station door.

'How long'll I get?' she said. 'What will they give me? Thirty days?'

He nodded.

'It won't take me as long as that,' she said. 'I say, what do people call you?--people who are fond of you, I mean?--Eddie or Ted?'

The Lubbeny Kiss

by Louise Rice, from *O Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1919*
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For many hours the hot July sun had beaten down upon the upland meadows and the pine woods of the lower New Jersey hills. So, when the dew began to fall, there arose from them a heady brew, distilled from blossoming milkweed and fruiting wild raspberry canes and mountain laurel and dried pine needles.

The Princess Dora Parse took this perfume into her lusty young lungs and blew it out again in a long sigh, after which she bent her first finger over her thumb as one must when one returns what all Romanys know to be "the breath of God." She did this almost unconsciously, for all her faculties were busied in another matter.

The eyes of a gorgio, weakened by an indoor life, would never have been able to distinguish the small object for which the princess looked, for she was perched up on the high seat of the red Romany _wardo_, and she drove her two strong, shaggy horses with a free and careless hand. But to Dora Parse the blur of vague shadows gliding by each wheel was not vague at all. Suddenly she checked her horses and sprang down.

The patteran for which she was looking was laid beneath a clump of the flowering weed which the Romanys call "stars in the sky." The gorgios know it as Queen Ann's lace, and the farmers curse it by the name of the wild carrot. The patteran was like a miniature log cabin without a roof, and across the top one large stick was laid, pointing upward along the mountain road.

Two brown and slender fingers on the big braid which dropped over her shoulder, the princess meditated, a shiver of fear running through her. What, she asked herself, could this mean? Why, for the first time in years, were the wagons to go to the farm of Jan Jacobus? Even if it were only a chance happening, it was a most unfortunate one, for young Jan, the fair-haired, giant son of old Jacobus, with his light blue eyes and his drawling, insolent speech, was the last person in the world that she wanted to see, especially with her man near.

For she had meant no harm. Many and many a time she had smiled into the eyes of men and felt pride in her power over them. Still--and yet--The princess scattered the patteran with her foot, for she knew that all the wagons must be ahead of her, since she had lagged so, and she leaped to her seat with one easy, lithe swing and drove on up the darkening road.

Jan Jacobus, like several other descendants of the Dutch settlers of New Jersey, held his upland farm on shares with John Lane's tribe of gypsies. Jacobuses and Bantas and Koppfs, they made no bones about having business dealings with the tribe of English Romanys which had followed a regular route, twice a year, from Maryland to the upper part of New Jersey, since before the beginning of the Revolutionary days. The descendants of the English settlers, the Hardys, the Lesters, the Vincents, and the Farrands, looked with still persisting English reserve upon the roamers of the woods and would have no traffic with them, though a good many of their sons and daughters had to know the few Romany young people who were left, by twos and threes in the towns for occasional years of schooling.

The tribe, trading in land in the two States which they frequented, and breeding horses, was very rich, but not very many people knew that. However, they were conceded to be shrewd bargainers, and when old John bought Martin Debbins' upland and rocky farm one year, with the money that he had made by a lucky purchase of a gangling colt whose owner had failed rightly to appraise its possibilities as a racer, Boonton and Dover and Morristown laughed.

"_Sal_ away," old John retorted pleasantly to the cashier of the bank in Boonton, where the tube had deposited its surplus funds for many years, "but you won't _sal_ so much when you _dik_ what I will make out of that joke."

The cashier thereupon looked thoughtful. It might well be that he and others would not laugh when they saw good fortune which might have been theirs following this genial old outlaw.

That summer the wagons camped on the Debbins place, and old John stocked it with a lot of fine hogs, for which the land was especially adapted. They fattened on the many acres, wooded with wild nut trees, and Jacobus--as keen a bargainer as any Romany, upon whom John Lane had had his eye all the time--took the farm on shares, and every year thereafter the cashier at the bank added a neat little total to the big balance which the tribe was rolling up.

And every year, as the wagons beat up toward Dover in July, old John would drive on ahead and spend a night of mingled business and pleasure with old Jan, reckoning up the profits on the Berkshires for which the farm was now famous, and putting down big mugs of the "black drink" for which Aunty Alice Lee, John Lane's ancient cousin, was equally famous. The amount of this fiery and head-splitting liquor which the two old men thus got away with was afterward gleefully recounted in the wagons and fearfully whispered of in the little Dutch church at Horse's Neck which the Jacobuses had attended for over a hundred years.

But never, as wagon after wagon had gone up the turning that led to the upward farm, had there been a patteran pointing that way. Always, it had shown the way onward and downward, to the little hamlet of Rockaway, where there was an old and friendly camping place, back of the blacksmith shop beyond the church. Old John never encouraged the wagons to visit any of the properties held by the tribe.

"Silver blackens the salt of friendship," he would say.

Dora Parse was driving her own _wardo_, a very fine one which had belonged to her mother. Lester Montague, of Sea Tack, Maryland, who makes the wagons of Romanys for all the Atlantic coast tribes, like his father before him, had done an especially good job of it. The princess had been certified, by the Romany rites, to old John's eldest son, George, for she had flatly refused to be married according to the gorgio ways. Not having been married a full year, he was not yet entitled to carry the heavy, silver-topped stick which is the badge of the married man, nor could he demand a place in his wife's tent or wagon unless she expressly invited him. Dora Parse and George Lane were passionately in love with each other, and their meeting and mating had been the flowering romance of the tribe, the previous summer.

The princess, being descended from a very old Romany family, as her name showed, was far higher in rank than any one in the Lane tribe. Her

aristocratic lineage showed in the set of her magnificent head, in the small, delicate fingers of her hand, and in the fire and richness of her eyes. Also, her skin was of the colour of old ivory upon which is cast a distant, faint reflection of the sunset, and her mouth, thinner than those of most Romanys, was of the colour of a ripe pomegranate.

"A _rauni, a puro rauni_," all the tribes of the eastern coast murmured respectfully, when Dora Parse's name was mentioned.

She was, indeed, a very great lady, but she was a flirtatious and headstrong girl. She was one of the few modern gypsies who still hold to the unadulterated worship of "those." All the members of John Lane's tribe were Methodists--had been since before they had migrated from England. In every wagon, save Dora's, a large illustrated Bible lay on a little table, and those who could, read them aloud to the rest of a Sunday afternoon. This did not mean, however, that the Romanys had descended to gorgio ways, or that they had wholly left off their attentions to "those". They combined the two. Old John was known as a fervent and eloquent leader in prayer at the Wednesday-night prayer meetings in the Maryland town where his church membership was held, but he had not ceased to carry the "box of meanings," as befitted the chief of the tribe.

This was a very beautifully worked box of pure gold, made by the great Nikola of Budapest, whose boxes can be found inside the shirt of every gypsy chief, where they are always carried. In them are some grains of wheat, garnered by moonlight, a peacock's feather, and a small silver bell with a coiled snake for a handle. When anything is to be decided, a few of the grains are taken out and counted. If they are even, the omen is bad, but if they are odd, all is well. Old John had an elastic and accommodating mind, like all Romanys, so he never thought it strange that he should ask the "box of meanings" whether or not it was going to storm on prayer-meeting nights.

Dora Parse thought of the box now, and wished that she might have the peacock's feather for a minute, so that her uneasy sense of impending bad luck would leave her. Then she stopped beside a cross-barred gate where an old man was evidently waiting for her.

"Lane was gettin' troubled about yuh," he said, as he turned the horses and peered curiously up at her. He knew who she was, not only because John Lane had said who it was who was late, but because Dora Parse's appearance was well known to the whole countryside. She was the only member of the tribe who kept to the full Romany dress. There were big gold loops in her small ears, and on her arms, many gold bracelets, whose lightness testified to their freedom from alloy. Her skirt was of red, heavily embroidered in blue, and her waist, with short sleeves, was of sheer white cloth, with an embroidered bolero. Her hair she wore in the ancient fashion, in two braids on either side of her face. She could well afford to, the chis muttered among themselves. Any girl with hair like that--

There was a long lane leading to the barns and to the meadow back of them, and there, said Jan, the tribe was to camp. As the princess drove along the short distance, she swiftly snatched off her little bolero, put it on wrong side out, and then snatched it off and righted it. That much, at least, she could do to avert ill luck. And her heart bounded as she drove in among the other wagons, for her husband came running to meet her and held out his arms.

She dropped into them and laid each finger tip, delicately, in succession, upon his eyes and his ears and his mouth, the seal of a betrothal and the sign whereby a Romany chal may know that a chi intends to accept him when he speaks for her before the tribe; a sign that lovers repeat as a sacred and intimate caress. She leaned, hard, into his arms, and he held her, pressing the tender, confidential kiss that is given to children behind her little ear.

Dora Parse suddenly ran both hands through his thick hair and gave it a little pull. She always did that when her spirits rose. Then she turned and looked at the scene, and at once she knew that there was to be some special occasion. Aunt Alice Lee was seated by a cooking fire, on which stood the enormous iron pot in which the "big meals" were prepared, when the tribe was to eat together and not in separate groups, as it usually did. There were some boards laid on wooden horses, and Pyramus Lee, aunt's grandson, was bringing blocks of wood from the woodshed for seats. Dora Parse clapped her hands with delight and looked at her man.

"_Tetcho_!" she exclaimed, approvingly, using the word that spells all degrees of satisfaction. "And what is it for, stickless one? Is it a talk over silver?"

"Yes, it is some business," George Lane replied, "but first there will be a _gillie shoon_."

A _gillie shoon_ has its counterpart in the English word "singsong," as it is beginning to be used now, with this exception: Romanys have few "fixed" songs. They have strains which are set, which every one knows, but a _gillie shoon_ means that the performers improvise continually; and in this sense it is a mystic ceremony, never held at an appointed time, except a "time of Mul-cerus," which really means a sort of religious wave of feeling, which strikes tribe after tribe, usually in the spring.

"Marda has come back," Aunt Lee called out to Dora Parse. No one ever called her by her full name of Marda Lee, because she was a Lee only by courtesy, having been adopted from a distant wagon when both her parents were killed in a thunderstorm. Marda, wearing the trim tailored skirt and waist that were her usual costume, was putting the big red tablecloth of the "big meals" on the boards. Dora went quickly toward the young girl and embraced her.

"How is our little scholar?" she asked affectionately.

"I am very well, Dora Parse, but a little tired," Marda answered.

"And did you receive another paper?"

"Yes. I passed my exams. It will save me half a year in Dover."

"That is good," Dora Parse replied, although she had only the dimmest idea of what Marda meant. The young girl knew that. She had just come from taking a special course in Columbia, and she was feeling the breach between herself and her people to be especially wide. Because of that, perhaps, she also felt more loving toward all of them than she ever had, and especially toward Dora about whom she knew something that was most alarming. Dora Parse noted the pale, grave face of her favourite friend with concern.

"Smile, bird of my heart," she entreated, "for we are to have a _gillie shoon_. Sit near me, that I may follow your heaven voice."

There was no flattery meant. The Romanys call the soprano "the heaven voice," the tenor "the sky voice," the contralto "the earth voice," and the basso "the sea voice." Dora had a really wonderful earth voice, almost as wonderful as Marda's heaven voice, which would have been remarkable even among opera singers, and the two were known everywhere for their improvisations. In answer to the remark of the princess, Marda gave her a strange look and said:

"I shall be near you, Dora Parse. Do not forget."

Her manner was certainly peculiar, the princess thought, as she walked away. But then one never knew what Marda was thinking about. Her great education set her apart from others. Any chi who habitually read herself to sleep over those most _puro libros_, "The Works of William Shakespeare, in Eight Volumes, Complete, with Glossary and Appendix," must not be judged by ordinary standards. The princess knew the full title of those _puro libros_, having painfully spelled it out, all one rainy afternoon, in Marda's mother's wagon, with repeated assistance and explanations from Marda, which had left the princess with a headache.

Now Aunt Lee took off the heavy iron cover of the pot and the odour of Romany duck stew, than which there is nothing in the world more appetizing, mingled with the sweet fragrance of the drying hay. Aunt thrust a fork as long as a poker into the bubbling mass and then gave the call that brings the tribe in a hurry.

"Empo!" she said in her shrill, cracked voice. "Empo! Empo!"

Laughing, teasing, jostling, talking, they all came, spilling out from the wagons, running from the barn, sauntering in, the lovers, by twos, and sat down before the plates heaped high with the duck and the vegetables with which it was cooked and the big loaves of Italian bread which the Romanys like and always buy as they pass through towns where there are Italian bakeries.

But they sat quiet then, and each one looked toward the princess, as politeness demanded, since she was the highest in rank among them.

She drew a sliver of meat from her plate and tossed it over her shoulder.

"To the great _ré_" she said.

"To the _shule_" each one murmured. Then, having paid their compliments to the sun and the moon, as all good Romanys must before eating, they fell to with heartiness.

When they were through, the mothers and the old men cleared away the tables and put the younger children to bed in the wagons, and the princess and George Lane and Marda and young Adam Lane, George's youngest brother, walked up and down, outside the glow from the cooking fire, taking the deep, full breaths which cleanse the mouth and prepare the soul for the ecstasy of song.

The men took away the table and the lanterns which had been standing about, and put out the cooking fire, for the big moon was rolling up

over the treetops, and Romanys sing by her light alone, if they can. Frogs were calling in the shallow stretches of the Upper Rockaway. People began to sit down in a big circle.

Then Marda started the _gillie shoon_. At first you could not have been sure whether the sound was far or near, for she "covered" her tones, in a way that many a gorgio gives years and much silver to learn. Then the wonderful tone swelled out, as if an organ stop were being pulled open, and one by one, the four leaders cast in the dropping notes which followed and sustained the theme that Marda was weaving:

"Lal--la--ai--lala--lalu! Ai--l-a-a--lalu!"

Old John, who had not appeared before, slid into the circle, holding by the sleeve a giant of a man who seemed to come half unwillingly. Dora Parse saw him, and she could not repress the shiver that ran through her at the sight of young Jan Jacobus, yet she sang on. The deep, majestic basses throbbed out the foundation of the great fuguelike chorus, and the sopranos soared and soared until they were singing falsetto, according to gorgio standards, only it sounded like the sweetly piercing high notes of violins, and the tenors and contraltos wove a garland of glancing melody between the two. They were all singing now. Rocking back and forth a little, swaying gently from side to side, lovers clasped together, mothers in their young sons' arms, and fathers clasping their daughters, they sent out to the velvet arch above them the heart cry of a race, proud and humble, cleanly voluptuous, strong and cruel, passionate and loving, elemental like the north wind and subtle as the fragrance of the poppy.

"Ai--lallu! Ai--lala--lala! Ai--lallu!"

Jan Jacobus sat with his big jaw dropping. Stupid boor that he was, he could not have explained the terrifying effect which this wild music and those tense, uplifting faces had upon him, but he would have given anything to be back in his mother's kitchen, with the lamp lit and the dark, unfamiliar night shut out.

As suddenly as the singing had begun, it stopped. People coughed, moved a little, whispered to one another. Then George Lane stood upon his feet, pulling Dora Parse with him.

"You see her?" he asked them all, holding out his wife in his arms.

Dora Parse knew then, for he was beginning the ritual of the man or woman who accuses a partner, before the tribe, of unfaithfulness. He was using the most _puro_ Romany _jib_, for only so can the serious affairs of the tribe tribunal be conducted. Dora Parse struggled in the strong hands of her man.

"No! No!" she cried. "No--no!"

"You see her?" George Lane repeated to the circle.

"We see her," they answered in a murmur that ran around from end to end.

"She is mine?"

"She is yours."

"What shall be done to her if she has lost the spirit of our love?"

Again Dora Parse furiously struggled, but George Lane held her.

"What shall be done with her? If that is so?"

Aunty Lee, as the oldest woman present, now took up the replies, as was her right and duty:

"Let her go to that other, if she wishes, and do you close your tent and your wagon against her."

"And if she does not wish?"

"Then punish her."

"What shall be done to the man?"

"Is he a Romany?"

"No."

Jan Jacobus half started up, but strong hands instantly jerked him down.

"He is a gorgio?"

"Yes."

"Do nothing. We do not soil our hands with gorgios. Let the woman bear the blame. She is a Romany. She should have known better. She is a woman, the wiser sex. It is her fault. Let her be punished."

"Do you all say so?" George Lane demanded.

"We say so." Again the rippling murmur.

Jan Jacobus made a desperate attempt to get on his feet, but, for all his strength, he might as well have tried to uncoil the folds of a great snake as to unbind the many hands that held him, for the Romanys have as many secret ways of restraining a person as the Japanese.

George Lane drew his wife tenderly close to him.

"She shall be punished," he said, "but first she shall hear, before you all, that I love her and that I know she has not lost the spirit of our love. Her fault was born of lightness of heart and vanity, not of evil."

"What is her fault? Name it," commanded Aunty Lee.

George Lane looked over at Jan.

"Her fault is that she trusted a gorgio to understand the ways of a Romany. For our girls have the spirit of love in their eyes, but no man among us would kiss a girl unless he received the sign from her. But the gorgio men are without honour. To-day, as this woman who is mine stopped to talk with a gorgio, among some trees where I waited, thinking to enter her wagon there, he kissed her, and she kissed him, in return."

"Not with the _lubbeny_ kiss--not with that kiss!" Dora Parse cried.

"May I be lost as Pharaoh was in the sea if I speak not the truth!"

The solemn oath, never taken by any Romany lightly and never falsely sworn to, rang out on the still night air. A cold, but firm little hand was slipped into Dora Parse's. Marda was near, as she had promised, and the hot palm of the princess closed gratefully upon it.

George Lane drew his wife upon his breast, and over her glossy head he looked for encouragement to Aunt Lee, who knew what he must do. He was very pale, but he must not hesitate.

"Kiss me, my love," he said, loudly and clearly, "here before my people, that I may punish you. Give me the kiss of love, when tongues and lips meet, that you may know your fault."

Now Dora Parse grew very pale, too, and she leaned far back against her man's arms, her eyes wide with terror. And no one spoke, for in all the history of the tribe this thing had never happened before, though every one had heard of it. Dora Parse knew that, if she refused, her oath would be considered false, and she would be cast out, not only from her husband's tent and wagon, but from all Romany tribes. And slowly she leaned forward, and George Lane bent down.

Jan Jacobus, although he had not understood the words of the ritual, thought he knew what had happened. The gypsy fool was forgiving his pretty wife. The young Dutchman settled back on his haunches, suddenly aware that he was no longer held. And then, with all the others, he sprang to his feet, for Dora Parse was hanging in her husband's arms, with blood pouring from her mouth and George Lane was sobbing aloud as he called her name.

"What--what--what happened?" Jan stammered. "Gawd--did he kill her?"

Old John Lane, his serene face unruffled, turned the bewildered and frightened boy toward the lane and spoke, in the silky, incisive tones which were half of his enchanting charm.

"Nothing much has happened. One of our girls allowed a gorgio to kiss her, so her man bit off the tip of her tongue. It is not necessary, often, to do it, but it is not a serious matter. It will soon heal. She will be able to talk--a little. It is really nothing, but I thought you might like to see it. It is seldom that gorgios are allowed to see a thing like that.

"Please say to your father that I will spend the evening as usual with him. My people will pass on."

Especially Men

by George Randolph Chester, from *The Wit and Humor of America, Volume V*.
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The tantalizing stream on the other side of the hedge seemed, to the hot and tired young man, to lead the way straight into the heart of Paradise itself. Six weary miles of white highway, wavering with heat and misty with hovering dust clouds, still lay between himself and the railroad that would whisk him away to the city. Behind him, conquered at fatiguing cost, were six more miles, stretching back to the village where not even a team could be hired on Sunday. Rather than spend the day in that dismal abode of Puritanism he had fled on foot, his business done, and this little creek, mocking, alluring, irresistible, was the only cheerful thing on which his eyes had rested in that whole stifling journey.

Even this had a drawback. He glanced up again, with a puzzled frown, at the queer sign glaring down at him from the hedge. It was the third one of the sort in the past quarter of a mile:

TRESPASSERS

_Are warned from these premises
under penalty of the law_

ESPECIALLY MEN

He turned away impatiently. Dust, dust, dust! He could feel it pasty on his tongue, gritty on his lips, grimy on his face. It had stiffened his hair, clogged his nostrils, sifted through his clothing, settled into his shoes. It was everywhere and all-pervading.

The forbidden creek, in the very refinement of derision, suddenly bubbled into a bar of clinking song--a perfect ecstasy of crystal notes--then as suddenly died down, babbling and gurgling, and flowed smoothly on, whispering and murmuring to itself of the delights to come in the heart of the cool woods. Just here, with a swift sweep between mossy, curved banks, the stream turned its back to him and hurried away among the trees with a coy invitation that was well-nigh maddening. He remembered just such a creek as that where, as a boy, he had used to go with his companions after school.

How delightful those boyish swims had been! In fancy he could still feel the chill shock as he had plunged in, the sharp catching of his breath, the resounding splash, the shower of icy drops, the soft yielding of the water--then the delicious buoyancy that had pervaded his limbs. He wondered, with a whimsical smile, how long he could "stay under," and if he could hold his eyes open while he dived, and if he could still swim "dog fashion" and back-handed on his back, and if he could float and tread water and "turtle."

How cool and shady and restful it looked in there! Just before the creek turned behind a clump of dogwood, a patch of sunlight lay on it, shooting down through the misty twilight of broad oak trees, and the surface of the water dimpled and glinted and laughed and flirted at him, before it slipped away into leaf-dimmed sylvan solitudes, in a way that was not to be longer resisted. He gave one more glance of distaste at the white hot road and gave up the struggle.

"Here goes the 'especial man,'" he said, looking up at the sign in smiling defiance, and forced his way through the hedge.

What a coquettish little stream that was! It leaped merrily down tiny, boulder-strewn inclines to show him how light-hearted and care-free it could be; it flowed sedately between narrow banks of turf to display its perfect propriety; it coyly hid behind walls of graceful, slender willows; it danced impudently into the open and dashed across clear spaces in frantic haste to escape him; it spread out, clear and limpid, upon little bars of golden sand, pretending frankly to reveal its pure, inmost depths; then raced on again, ever beckoning, ever enticing, ever cajoling, until at last it plunged straight at a wall of dense, tangled underbrush, and, with a vixenish gurgle of delight at its own blandishing duplicity, vanished underneath the low sweeping mass of leaves without even so much as a good-by!

The pursuer was not to be daunted. Doggedly he fought his way around and through the swampy underbrush and presently stood blinking his delighted eyes in a little natural clearing that was a glorious climax to all the tantalizing coquetry of the creek. Encircled by drooping, long-leaved willows that were themselves enringed by stately trees, lay a broad, deep pool, clear as crystal, one side carpeted with velvety turf and screened with leafy draperies, and the whole canopied by the smiling blue sky. With a cry of pleasure the young man hastily threw off his clothing, and, as he undressed, a school-boy taunt whimsically recurred to him.

"Last one in's a nigger!" he shouted to the squirrel that he caught peering at him from the far side of a limb, and plunged into the pool.

One by one he gleefully tried all the old boyish tricks until at last, tiring of them, he lay floating peacefully on his back, looking up at the sky and covering the entire visible surface of it with air castles, as young men will. There was no dusty road, no broiling hot sun, no six miles of weary distance yet to cover.

There was a rustle and a patter among the trees. Two dogs came bounding to the edge of the water and barked at the bather in friendly fashion. They were bouncing big St. Bernards, but scarcely more than puppies, and they capered and danced in awkward delight when he splashed water at them. As a further evidence of their friendly feeling they suddenly pounced upon his clothing.

"Hey there!" cried the bather, and scrambled out to rescue his apparel. It was kind of him, the dogs thought, to take so much interest in the game, and, not to be outdone in heartiness, they scampered off through the woods, taking the clothes with them. All they left behind was his hat, his shoes and one sock, his collar and cuffs and tie. He threw sticks and stones after them and had started to chase them when a new and dreadful sound smote on his ear. It was the voices of women!

There was but one safe hiding-place--the pool. With rare presence of mind he concealed the pathetic remnant of his belongings and plunged just in time, diving under a clump of low-hanging willows where a friendly root gave support to his arms and breast.

Two elderly ladies of severe and forbidding aspect came slowly within his range of vision. One was tall and thin and the other was short and

thin, while both wore plain, skimp, black gowns and had their hair parted in the center and smoothed down flatly over their ears. They were silent with some vexed and weighty problem as they drew near, but, as they came just opposite to him, the taller of the two suddenly burst out with:

"Men, men, men! Nothing but men, morning, noon and night. Please explain, Sister Ann! Where did Adnah, during my brief absence, get her sudden curiosity about the despicable sex?"

"It was the recent visit of Doctor Laura Phelps, Sister Sarah," meekly replied the smaller woman. "She lost a magazine while here and Adnah found it. The publication contained several love stories, so-called, an illustrated article on 'Young Captains of Industry' and another on 'Handsome Young Men of the Stage.' I burned the pernicious thing as soon as it came into my hands, but, alas, the damage had been done!"

"Damage, indeed, Sister Ann!" snapped the other. "Since the age of five, poor Sister Jane's orphan has never been permitted to see a man. Big country girls have even been hired to do our farm work. And this, _this_ is the end of fourteen years of self-sacrificing care!"

The young man in the pool cautiously ducked his head under the water. A mosquito had settled back of his ear and was driving him mad.

"Dreadful!" moaned Sister Ann. "Adnah goes about sighing all the day, and looks over-long in the mirror, and takes unseemly pains with her dressing, and does up her hair with flowers, and has feverishly pink cheeks, and likes to sit in a corner and brood, and takes long walks by herself, and especially, _especially_, seems fond of moonlight!"

A snake slid down off the bushes into the water near the young man and he "wanted out," but he stayed.

"Moonlight!" sniffed Sarah. "Moonlight!" There is no language to express the disdain with which she spoke this word of philandering and frivolity.

"Moonlight is very pretty," ventured the other. "I rather like it myself."

"At _your_ time of life!" retorted Sister Sarah. "You are too sentimental, Sister Ann, as well as too careless."

Thank Heaven they were going! The young man waited until their voices died in the distance, then crept cautiously to the bank. He had to find those dogs, and in a hurry. He had just seated himself to put on his shoes for the search, when he again heard the voices of women and once more plunged into the pool, like a monster yellow frog, as he reflected he must seem to the squirrel in the tree.

"But, Aunt Matilda, how do you know?" he heard as he came up under the willows. This new voice, sweet and limpid, belonged to a girl of such striking appearance that the young man was on the point of forgetting his dilemma--until that infernal mosquito settled down back of his ear again!

"My dear Adnah," said a jerky little voice in answer, "your aunts, remember, were all young once, and considered great beauties in their

day." There was a world of gentle pride in Aunt Matilda's voice as she said this, and it sounded so well that she said it over again. "Great beauties in their day! In consequence they all had their experiences with men, and know that there is not one to be trusted. Not one, my child, not one! Believe your aunts."

"It seems impossible, aunty," declared the soft voice of Adnah. "Why, in that magazine were the pictures of some of the most noble-looking creatures--"

"Tut, tut, child, those are the very worst kind," hastily interrupted Aunt Matilda. "The more handsome they are, the more dangerous. Since you remain so incredulous, however, I suppose I shall have to tell you what we know about them."

The young man in the pool felt his circulation stopping. The two women were calmly sitting down on the bank to talk confidences, and from what he knew of the sex they were as likely as not to sit there until doomsday, compelling him to appear before the angel Gabriel without even a shroud. He was conscious of the beginning of a cramp in his left leg and his shoulders were becoming icy. He had to be motionless, too, and that was another hardship. The least movement might betray him, for the women sat quite near, and Adnah was facing him. Thanks to the thickness of his leafy hiding-place she could not see him, but he could see her quite plainly, and she was well worth looking at. She, too, wore a plain, skimp, black dress, and her brown hair was parted in the center and smoothed down over her ears, but there the resemblance to Aunt Matilda and the others ended, for her hair was wavy in spite of the severely straight brushing, and it glinted gold where little flecks of sunlight filtered through the branches of the tall trees to caress it. In the hair, too, was a single red rose, caught into place with a natural grace that it seemed a pity to waste on three spinster aunts and two dogs, and the same note of color was repeated in another rebellious blossom at the throat. The young face was plump and oval, and the cheeks were pink, the brown eyes were wide and sparkling and--Oh, well, the young man in the pool stopped cataloguing her attractions and simply summed her up as a stunningly pretty girl. Then he tried once more to get rid of that maddening mosquito and wished to high Heaven that they would go!

"When our dear mother died we four girls were all quite young," began Aunt Matilda, pausing primly to smooth down her skirts, and the young man in the watery prison gave up in despair. She was starting out like the old-fashioned story books, which never arrived any place, and never knew how to get back if they did. "Your Aunt Sarah was eighteen years old, your Aunt Ann and myself sixteen, and your poor, deluded mother fourteen. Our father, child, married again within the year, and so you see our acquaintance with the duplicity of men began at a very early age. Of course, we refused to live with a stepmother or to allow her to occupy our own dear mother's house. Left, then, upon our own responsibilities at so tender a period of our lives, it behooved us to conduct ourselves with the strictest of propriety, and I am most happy to say that we came triumphantly through the ordeal. Naturally, we being great beauties in those days, my child, great beauties, many gay young men fluttered about us, and some of them really made quite favorable impressions upon us. There was one in particular--"

Aunt Matilda paused for a sigh and fixed her eyes in sad reminiscence upon a little clump of ferns that, full of conceit, were waving

incessant salutes at their dainty reflections in the water.

"Hang the story of her life!" muttered the miserable youth in the pool. His teeth were beginning to chatter.

"Do go on, aunty!" cried the eager Adnah.

"Well, child, they were all alike. Having insinuated their way into our confidences by agreeable manners and by their really indisputable attractiveness, having aroused the beginnings of tender emotions, what did these young men do, one and all? Why, instead of waiting until the acquaintance had ripened into mutual undying affection and then falling gracefully to their knees with honorable proposals of marriage, they one and all chose what seemed to be favorable moments and strove, by cajolery or stealth or even force, to kiss us. To _kiss_ us!"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Adnah.

There was a moment's silence. The young man in the pool could feel the goose-flesh pimpling between his shoulder blades.

"After all, though, it might not have been so very dreadful," finally commented Adnah, after a thoughtful sigh.

"Adnah!" cried the horrified Aunt Matilda. "I am astounded!"

"I can't help it, aunty," said Adnah. "I can't make it seem so terrible, no matter how hard I try. In fact it--it seems to me that it would have been--well--rather nice."

"Adnah!"

"But, aunty, didn't it ever seem that way to you, sometimes?"

Aunt Matilda was shocked and silent for a moment, then over her pale cheeks crept a pink flush.

"I'll not deny," she presently confessed in a hesitant voice, "that if we had not had each other to rely upon for firmness we might perhaps have been deluded by some of these young scapegraces. They were truly quite appealing at times. There was one in particular--"

Again Aunt Matilda became lost in meditation. The young man in the pool swore softly, even though he perceived the tear that trembled upon the lady's eyelash. It was impossible to be sympathetic while a leech was fastened to his ankle.

"My mother must have thought the way I do, I am sure," persisted Adnah. The remark brought Aunt Matilda out of the past with a jerk.

"Your poor mother had the most pitiful experience of all, child," she replied. "She married. Shortly after you were born, she died, fortunately spared all knowledge of your father's faithless fickleness. Adnah, he, too, married again! You, Adnah, was too young to protect yourself from a stepmother, but we came to your rescue. Your great uncle, Peter, had just died and left us this fine estate, and here we are, trying to shield you from the wiles of the destroyer, man!"

"Some men must be nice, or so many, many girls would not want them,"

commented Adnah, still unconvinced.

"I'll not deny, dear, that some of them _seem_ quite nice," admitted the other with a sigh. "There was one in particular--"

The dogs interrupted at this moment with a racing struggle for some red and brown object.

"_Now_ what has Castor got?" cried Adnah, jumping up to give chase in a healthy and delightful burst of speed.

The youth in the pool dismally realized that Castor had his missing sock, a brown lisle affair with a quaint red pattern in it, at a dollar a pair. His teeth were pounding together like castanets, now, so loudly that he feared Aunt Matilda must surely hear them. Adnah presently returned, flushed rosy red by the exercise and more charming than ever.

"I couldn't catch them," she panted. "Gracious, but I am warm! There is plenty of time for a plunge before dinner. Just wait, Aunt Mattie, until I run for the bathing suits," and she flashed away again.

Great Cæsar's ghost! The hidden youth grew so warm with apprehension that the goose-flesh disappeared and the chattering of his teeth stopped. His dilemma was unspeakable and unsolvable, seemingly, but suddenly it was solved for him. The dogs came back!

The sock had been shredded and they sought fresh diversion. After a cordially barked invitation for the young man to come out and play, they went in after him. There was a tremendous splashing struggle. Suddenly the willows were pulled down by a muscular bare arm, and the face of a young man appeared above it to the astounded gaze of Aunt Matilda.

"Excuse me, madam," he began, lunging viciously at Castor and Pollux with his feet. "Please call off your dogs."

Aunt Matilda, pale but determined, whipped an antiquated monster of a pistol from her pocket, though she held it far off from her and to one side, with no intention, past, present or future, of ever firing it. It got its effectiveness from size alone, and was built for pure moral suasion if ever a pistol was.

"Hold perfectly still or I shall shoot," she quaveringly warned him. "You are a male trespasser, sir!"

"I sincerely regret it, madam," replied the culprit, slapping viciously at the mosquito behind his ear. He got it that time.

"You probably will," freezingly retorted Aunt Matilda. "I shall telephone for the sheriff immediately, and if you are still here when he arrives you shall receive the full penalty of the law."

The young man did some quick thinking. It was necessary.

"Madam, your dogs have stolen my clothing and my money, and I can not leave until I get them back," he presently declared with lucky inspiration. "If you have me arrested for trespass I shall bring suit for the recovery of property."

Aunt Matilda was sufficiently perplexed to lower her pistol and allow

him to explain, while she coaxed the dogs out of the water. He was a splendid talker, and had fine, honest-looking blue eyes.

There was a rush of swift footsteps among the trees.

"Hide!" she commanded in sudden panic.

He promptly hid, and when Adnah arrived with the bathing suits, that young lady found her aunt calmly seated on the ground, holding Castor and Pollux each by a dripping collar.

"Leave my suit and return to the house at once with these dogs," directed Aunt Matilda without turning her head.

"Why, Aunt Mattie, what's the matter?"

"Nothing!" snapped Aunt Matilda in desperation. "Go back to the house and stay until I come. Ask no questions."

Adnah searched the scene in mystification for a moment.

"Yes, aunty," she suddenly said, and walked away in a flutter of excitement. She had caught the gleam of a bright eye peering at her from among the willows!

She burst into a spontaneous rhapsody of song as she went, trilling and warbling in sweet, untaught cadences, unconsciously like a bird singing to its mate in the springtime. She had a wonderful voice. The young man was sorry when she was out of hearing, but glad, too, for the water was beginning to pucker his cuticle in hard ridges like a wash-board.

"Now, young man," said Aunt Matilda, "I shall leave this bathing suit here for your use. I shall expect you to put it on and retire from the premises as quickly as possible."

"I must remain until nightfall," was the firm reply. "I must find my money and clothes. I should feel ridiculous to be seen in such clothing as that. You, yourself, would scarcely care to have me seen emerging from your premises, on Sunday especially, in such outlandish garments."

That last argument told. Aunt Matilda visibly weakened.

"Very well, then," she grudgingly agreed, "but at dusk--Mercy, young man, how your teeth do chatter! Are you getting a chill? I'll bring you a bowl of boneset tea and some dinner right away!" and she hurried off in much concern.

The young man lost no time in getting into that bathing suit, for the chill of the water was upon him. The suit consisted merely of a pair of blue bloomers that came just below his knees, and a blue blouse that split down the back and at the armpits the moment he buttoned it in front; still he was very grateful for it--grateful for the warm glow that began to pervade him the moment he had donned it. He put on his one sock and his shoes, his hat, collar, tie and cuffs to keep the dogs from getting them, and was quite comfortable when Aunt Matilda came bustling back with a bowl of steaming tea and a tray loaded with good things to eat.

She sat by admiring his appetite until he had finished, then she made

him drink the boneset tea to the last drop. He talked admirably all through the "dinner," and it was with a sigh of almost regret that she started away with the empty dishes. She came back presently.

"You will find our summer cottage up in that direction," she pointed out. "We shall expect you to--to keep out of range during the day, but to report at the kitchen door at dusk, when you will be escorted to the road."

"I shall follow your instructions to the letter," he assured her, and she again slowly walked away. To save her, the man-hater could not think of another reasonable excuse for prolonging the interview. He was a most gentlemanly young man, and he had splendid eyes!

The male trespasser spent the next hour in hunting clothes and anathematizing dogs. His finds were confined strictly to rags and pairless arms and sleeves, and finally he gave up, with everything accounted for but worthless. Discovering a high, grassy plot near the creek, screened from the woods by a thick copse of hazel bushes, he lay down to think matters over and promptly fell asleep.

Perhaps half an hour later he slowly opened his eyes with the feeling that he was being compelled to awaken, and found Adnah seated quietly beside him, keeping the mosquitoes away from him with a gracefully waved hazel branch.

"Just sleep right on," she gently urged. "I often sleep for hours on hot afternoons in this very place."

"How did you come here?" he demanded, sitting up, startled.

"I hunted you," she confessed with a delighted little laugh. "I'm so glad you're awake at last and don't want to sleep any more. I felt just sure that your eyes were blue. And they are!"

Her delight at this fact was so obvious that he felt uneasy.

"You see, I listened outside the window while Aunt Mattie told Aunts Ann and Sarah all about you," she confidently went on. "Aunt Sarah and Aunt Ann were for telephoning for the sheriff anyhow, but Aunt Mattie wouldn't let them. She likes you. So do I."

"Oh!" said the astonished young man. For the first time in his life conversation had failed him.

"Of course," said the girl simply. "Well, I waited until they all lay down for their after-dinner naps, and climbed out of my window so as not to disturb them. They do enjoy their naps so much, you know. I didn't find you at the pool but I just hunted until I did find you. I've been sitting here a long time watching you. You look so nice when you are asleep."

Now what should he say? With any ordinary girl he could have found the answer, but this one had him floored.

"But you look ever so much nicer when you are awake," she further informed him, with a clear-eyed straightforwardness that was worse than disconcerting. In desperation he answered, with her own frankness, that she was nice looking herself. He meant it, too.

"I'm so glad you think so," she contentedly sighed. "I just knew we should like each other as soon as I saw you lying there asleep."

It was he who blushed, not the girl.

She partly raised up to recapture her hazel branch, and when she sat down again her shoulder remained lightly touching his arm. An electric thrill ran through him and tingled out at his fingertips, but he never moved a muscle. She looked up at him in peaceful happiness and he somehow felt very mean and unworthy. Her eyes made him uncomfortable. The whole trouble was that she was so honest--had never been taught to conceal her thoughts by the thousand and one spoken and unspoken lies of ordinary social intercourse. She was neither timid nor bold, but merely natural, with never a suspicion that conventionality demanded a man and a maid to leave a mutual liking unconfessed. It was rather rough on the young man. He was not used to having the truth fly around in such reckless fashion in his conversations with girls, and it bothered him.

"I'm not a bit afraid of you," she presently told him. "I knew all the time that Aunt Mattie was wrong. She told me that all men were dreadful, and that the first thing they did was to--to kiss a girl they liked."

"She knows nothing about it," he replied rather crossly. For some unaccountable reason he was angry with himself and with her.

"Indeed, she doesn't," she agreed, eying him thoughtfully. Presently she added: "I do not believe, though, that I should have minded it so much if she had been right."

Shade of Plato! He looked down at the tempting curve of her red lips. They were round and full and soft as the petals of a half-blown rosebud, warm and tender and sweet, with just the least trace of puckering to indicate how they could meet the pressure of other lips. He felt his heart come pounding up into the region of his Adam's apple, and he trembled as he had not done since his first attack of puppy love at the age of fourteen. His breath came and went with a painful flutter but he made no movement. If it had been any sort of a girl under the sun, especially if so attractive as this one, she would have been kissed until she gasped for breath; but he just couldn't do it. However, if she went so far as to ask him to kiss her, by George! he didn't see how he was to get out of it!

"I should really like to kiss you," he admitted with a martyr-like sigh and a further echo of her own frankness, "but I shan't. Under the circumstances it would not be right."

He reflected, grinning, that mother would be proud if she could see him now, then he thought, grinning harder, of the boys at the club. If they only knew!

"There, didn't I say so!" she triumphantly exclaimed. "I told Aunt Matilda that there certainly must be some good men in the world!"

Good! He winced as certain memories of his careless youth began to do cake-walks up and down his conscience. Then he changed the subject.

She snuggled up closely to him, by and by, confidingly and unsuspecting, and just talked and talked and talked. It was very pleasant to have her

there at his side, babbling innocently away in that sweet, musical voice. How pretty she was, how artless and trusting, how honest and how heart-whole! It came to him that his family and friends had for a long time been telling him that he ought to get married, and he began to see that they were right.

How delightful it would be to stay on forever in this enchanted grove with her. He presently found himself fervently saying it, though he had not intended such words to pass his lips. She took the wish as a matter of course. She had confidently expected him to feel that way about it, and, if he felt that way, to say so.

"Adnah Eggleston!"

They jumped like juvenile jam-thieves caught red-handed.

Aunt Sarah and Aunt Ann and Aunt Matilda rigidly confronted them, having stolen upon them unseen, unheard, unthought of, and they stood now in grim horror, merciless and implacable. They advanced in a swooping body, after one moment of agonizing suspense, and snatched Adnah into their midst, glaring three kinds of loathing scorn upon the interloping serpent.

"Has this person _kissed_ you, or attempted to do so?" hissed Aunt Sarah.

"Not yet," meekly answered poor Adnah.

"I assure you ladies--," began the serpent, but Aunt Sarah cut him short.

"Silence, sir!" she commanded. "We wish no explanations from you, whatsoever."

Thus crushing him, the little company wheeled and marched away, bearing Adnah an unwilling and impenitent captive, two of them ingeniously keeping behind her so that she should have no opportunity of even exchanging a backward glance with the serpent.

Left to himself the serpent moodily kicked holes in the turf. He had an intense desire to do something violent--to smash something, no matter what. He was furious with the trio of aunts. It was a shame, he told himself, to bury alive a beautiful and noble young woman like that, through a warped and mistaken notion of the world. What right had they to condemn a sweet and affectionate creature such as she to a starved and morbid spinsterhood? It was his duty to rescue her from the colorless fate that hung over her, and he would do his duty. He was unconsciously flexing his biceps as he said it.

Would he? How? Should he get out a search warrant or a writ of replevin? This whimsical view of the case only exasperated him the more as it presented the utter hopelessness of approaching her--of ever seeing her again--and, when the dogs came chasing an utterly inconsequential and useless butterfly in his direction, he pelted them with stones until they yelped. Hang the dogs, anyhow. It was all their fault!

Next he blamed himself. If he had only resisted that creek like a man he wouldn't have been a hundred miles from home without clothes or money, and silly about a girl he had never seen until that day.

Then he blamed the girl. Why, _why_ was she such a confiding and altogether artless and bewitching little fool? She wasn't! He remembered her eyes and abjectly apologized to the memory of her. She was everything that was sweet and pure and womanly--everything that was desirable in every sense--well-bred, well-schooled, unspoiled of the world, without guile or subterfuge, beautiful, healthy, honest. That had been the only startling thing about her--just honesty. It spoke ill for himself and the world in which he lived that this should have seemed startling! What a wonderful creature she was! By the Eternal, she belonged to him and he meant to have her! She loved him, too!

He sat down on the bank to think over this phase of the question. He had known her several years in the minute and a half since noon, and it was time this foolishness came to an end.

Time flies when youth listens to the fancied strains of Mendelssohn's Spring Song. He was surprised, presently, to note a strange hush settling down over the woods. A chill vapor seemed to arise from the water. There was a melancholy note in the tweet of the low-flitting birds. The rustling trees softened their murmur to a continuous whisper, soothing and caressing. The tinkle of the creek became more metallic and pronounced. Near by, down the stream, a sudden chorus of frogs burst into croaking, their isolated notes blended by the chirping undertone of the crickets and tree toads. There were other sounds, mysterious, untraceable, but all musical in greater or lesser degree.

He understood at last. These sounds, the rustling leaves, the flitting birds, the tinkling creek, the frogs, tree toads and crickets and those other intangible cadences, these were the instruments of nature's vast orchestra, playing their lullaby, languorous and sweet, for the drowsy day. It was dusk, and he was desperately in love with Adnah, and he had on a fool bloomer bath suit and no money, and he had to go back into civilization just as he was. Woe, woe, woe and anathema!

At the house he found a table set under a big oak tree back of the kitchen. Supper for one was illumined by the rays of a solitary lantern. Aunt Sarah and Aunt Ann, each with a pistol in her lap, sat grimly to one side. Adnah nor Aunt Matilda were anywhere to be seen, and he divined with a thrill that Aunt Matilda was acting as jailer to the young woman until he should be safely off the premises. Evidently she had been hard to manage. Bless the little girl!

He took off his hat as he approached and bowed respectfully.

"I should like you to know who I am," he began.

"You will please to eat your supper without conversation," Aunt Sarah sternly interrupted.

"I wish to pay my addresses to your niece," he protested, but the two ladies, finding rudeness necessary, clasped their hands to their ears.

"Kindly eat," said Aunt Sarah, without removing her hands.

He sat down and glared at the food in despair. He thought he heard Adnah's voice and the sounds of a scuffle in the house, and it gave him inspiration. He arose, and, leaning his hands on the edge of the table, shouted as loudly as he could:

"I am John Melton, of Philadelphia. I will give you as many references as you like. I wish your permission to write to your niece and, later on, to call upon her. May I do so?"

"Are you going to eat your supper?" inquired Aunt Sarah.

He gave up. He could not, as a gentleman, take Aunt Sarah's hands from her ears and make her listen to what he had to say. He turned sadly away from the table. The armed escort also arose.

"Please lead the way," requested Aunt Sarah. "The path leads directly from the front of the cottage to the road."

He had stalked, in dismal silence, almost half way down the winding avenue of trees, moodily watching the gigantic shadows of his limbs leaping jerkily among the shrubbery, when it occurred to him that the women could scarcely carry the lantern and pistols and still hold their ears.

"I am John Melton, of Philadelphia," he shouted, and looked back to address them more directly. Alas, the pistols reposed in the pockets of the two prim aprons, the lantern smoked askew at Aunt Sarah's waist, and both women were holding their hands to their ears!

He could not know that they had been whispering about him, however, and really, for man-haters, their remarks had been very complimentary. Not even that ridiculous costume could hide his athletic figure, his good carriage and pleasant address.

They were nearing the road when they heard a woman's voice shrieking for them to wait, and presently Aunt Matilda came running after them, breathless and excited.

"You must come back to the house at once, all of you," she panted. "Adnah is wildly hysterical. She insists that she must have this young man, monster or no monster--that she will die without him. I truly believe that she would!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah. "Come on, then!"

It was Aunt Sarah who swiftly and anxiously led the way. At the door of the parlor she paused and confronted the young man.

"Remember," she warned, "that however impulsive our poor, misguided niece may appear, you _must_ not kiss her!"

Without waiting for reply she opened the door for him. Adnah, smiling happily through the last of her tears, sprang to meet him, and, seizing his hand, drew him down on the couch beside her.

"I'm going to keep you here always, now," she declared with pretty authority, as she locked her arm in his and interlaced their fingers.

He looked around at the aunts and suddenly longed for his own clothes. They had drawn their chairs in a close semi-circle about the couch and were helplessly staring. He felt the hot blood burning in his cheeks, on his temples, down the back of his neck.

"You _will_ stay, won't you?" Adnah anxiously asked him.

"I think I shall take you with me, instead," he replied, smiling down at her in an attempt to conquer his embarrassment.

Adnah rapturously sighed. The spectators suddenly arose, retiring to the far corner of the room, where they held an excited, whispered consultation. Presently they came back and sat down in the same solemn half-circle. Aunt Sarah ceremoniously cleared her throat.

"You will please to unclasp your hands and sit farther apart," she directed. This obeyed, she proceeded: "Now, Mr. Nelson--"

"Melton, if you please," corrected the young man, producing a business card that he had rescued.

"Oh!" exclaimed the aunts, exchanging wondering glances.

"We understood that it was Nelson," murmured Aunt Matilda. It seemed that the hands had not been so tightly clasped over the ears as he had thought.

Aunt Sarah gravely adjusted her glasses.

"John Melton, Jr.," she read. "Representing Melton and Melton, Administrators and Real Estate Dealers. General John A. Melton. John Melton, Jr."

There was a suppressed flutter of excitement and again the three aunts exchanged surprised glances.

"I think I may safely say, may I not, Sisters Ann and Matilda, that this quite alters the case?" was Aunt Sarah's strange query.

"Quite so, indeed," agreed Aunt Matilda, complacently smoothing her apron.

"Very much so," added Aunt Ann.

"Decidedly," resumed Aunt Sarah. "Your father, young man, handled the estate of our deceased Uncle Peter in a most upright and satisfactory fashion--for a man. So far, much is in your favor, since our unfortunate niece will not be contented without some sort of a husband. Your personal qualifications have yet to be proved, however. We presume that you can offer documentary evidence as to your own worth, sir?"

"Not for a day or so, unfortunately," confessed the young man. "The dogs destroyed all my papers. The only thing I could find was a portion of a brief note from my mother."

The three aunts, as by one electric impulse, bent forward with shining eyes.

"From your mother!" hungrily repeated Aunt Sarah. "Let us see it, if you will, please."

He produced it reluctantly. It was not exactly the sort of letter a young man cares to parade.

"My beloved son," Aunt Sarah read aloud, pausing to bestow a softened glance upon him. "I can not wait for your return to say how proud I am of you. Your noble and generous action in regard to the aged widow Crane's property has just come to my ears, through a laughing complaint of your father about your unbusinesslike methods in dealing with those who have been unfortunate. In spite of his whimsically expressed disapproval, he feels that you are an honor to him. Your sister Nellie cried in her pride and love of you when she heard--"

The rest of the letter had been lost, but this was enough.

Adnah had gradually hitched closer to him, and now her hand, unreprieved, stole affectionately to his shoulder. Aunt Matilda was wiping her eyes. Aunt Ann openly sniffled. Aunt Sarah cleared her throat most violently.

"Your references are all that we could wish, young man," she presently admitted in a businesslike tone. "We shall waive, in your favor, our objections to men in general. If we must have one in the family we are to be congratulated upon having one whose mother is proud of him."

Coming from Aunt Sarah this was a marvelous concession. The young man bowed his head in pleased acknowledgment and, by and by, crossed his legs in comfort as a home-like feeling began to settle down upon him. Suddenly observing their bloomed exposure, however, he tried to poke his legs under the couch, and twiddled his thumbs instead.

"And when do our young people expect to be married?" meek Sister Ann presently ventured to inquire.

"As quickly as possible," promptly answered the young man, smiling triumphantly down at the girl by his side. He was astonished, and rather pleased, too, to find her suddenly embarrassed and blushing prettily.

"I believe, then," announced Aunt Sarah, after due deliberation, "that you may now kiss our niece; may he not, Sisters Ann and Matilda?"

"He may!" eagerly assented the others.

"Very well, then, proceed," commanded Aunt Sarah, folding her arms.

The young man hastily braced himself to meet this new shock, then gazed down at the girl again. She was still blushing in her newly-found self-conscious femininity, but she trustingly held up her pretty lips to him, looking full into his eyes with the steady flame of her love burning unveiled--and he kissed her.

"Ah-h-h-h!" sighed the three man-hating spinsters in ecstatic unison.

The Devotee

by Rabindranath Tagore, from *The Hungry Stones And Other Stories*
EBook #2518

At a time, when my unpopularity with a part of my readers had reached the nadir of its glory, and my name had become the central orb of the journals, to be attended through space with a perpetual rotation of revilement, I felt the necessity to retire to some quiet place and endeavour to forget my own existence.

I have a house in the country some miles away from Calcutta, where I can remain unknown and unmolested. The villagers there have not, as yet, come to any conclusion about me. They know I am no mere holiday-maker or pleasure-seeker; for I never outrage the silence of the village nights with the riotous noises of the city. Nor do they regard me as ascetic, because the little acquaintance they have of me carries the savour of comfort about it. I am not, to them, a traveller; for, though I am a vagabond by nature, my wandering through the village fields is aimless. They are hardly even quite certain whether I am married or single; for they have never seen me with my children. So, not being able to classify me in any animal or vegetable kingdom that they know, they have long since given me up and left me stolidly alone.

But quite lately I have come to know that there is one person in the village who is deeply interested in me. Our acquaintance began on a sultry afternoon in July. There had been rain all the morning, and the air was still wet and heavy with mist, like eyelids when weeping is over.

I sat lazily watching a dappled cow grazing on the high bank of the river. The afternoon sun was playing on her glossy hide. The simple beauty of this dress of light made me wonder idly at man's deliberate waste of money in setting up tailors' shops to deprive his own skin of its natural clothing.

While I was thus watching and lazily musing, a woman of middle age came and prostrated herself before me, touching the ground with her forehead. She carried in her robe some bunches of flowers, one of which she offered to me with folded hands. She said to me, as she offered it: "This is an offering to my God."

She went away. I was so taken aback as she uttered these words, that I could hardly catch a glimpse of her before she was gone. The whole incident was entirely simple, but it left a deep impression on my mind; and as I turned back once more to look at the cattle in the field, the zest of life in the cow, who was munching the lush grass with deep breaths, while she whisked off the flies, appeared to me fraught with mystery. My readers may laugh at my foolishness, but my heart was full of adoration. I offered my worship to the pure joy of living, which is God's own life. Then, plucking a tender shoot from the mango tree, I fed the cow with it from my own hand, and as I did this I had the satisfaction of having pleased my God.

The next year when I returned to the village it was February. The cold season still lingered on. The morning sun came into my room, and I was grateful for its warmth. I was writing, when the servant came to tell me that a devotee, of the Vishnu cult, wanted to see me. I told him, in an absent way, to bring her upstairs, and went on with my writing. The

Devotee came in, and bowed to me, touching my feet. I found that she was the same woman whom I had met, for a brief moment, a year ago.

I was able now to examine her more closely. She was past that age when one asks the question whether a woman is beautiful or not. Her stature was above the ordinary height, and she was strongly built; but her body was slightly bent owing to her constant attitude of veneration. Her manner had nothing shrinking about it. The most remarkable of her features were her two eyes. They seemed to have a penetrating power which could make distance near.

With those two large eyes of hers, she seemed to push me as she entered.

"What is this?" she asked. "Why have you brought me here before your throne, my God? I used to see you among the trees; and that was much better. That was the true place to meet you."

She must have seen me walking in the garden without my seeing her. For the last few days, however, I had suffered from a cold, and had been prevented from going out. I had, perforce, to stay indoors and pay my homage to the evening sky from my terrace. After a silent pause the Devotee said to me: "O my God, give me some words of good."

I was quite unprepared for this abrupt request, and answered her on the spur of the moment: "Good words I neither give nor receive. I simply open my eyes and keep silence, and then I can at once both hear and see, even when no sound is uttered. Now, while I am looking at you, it is as good as listening to your voice."

The Devotee became quite excited as I spoke, and exclaimed: "God speaks to me, not only with His mouth, but with His whole body."

I said to her: "When I am silent I can listen with my whole body. I have come away from Calcutta here to listen to that sound."

The Devotee said: "Yes, I know that, and therefore I have come here to sit by you."

Before taking her leave, she again bowed to me, and touched my feet. I could see that she was distressed, because my feet were covered. She wished them to be bare.

Early next morning I came out, and sat on my terrace on the roof. Beyond the line of trees southward I could see the open country chill and desolate. I could watch the sun rising over the sugar-cane in the East, beyond the clump of trees at the side of the village. Out of the deep shadow of those dark trees the village road suddenly appeared. It stretched forward, winding its way to some distant villages on the horizon, till it was lost in the grey of the mist.

That morning it was difficult to say whether the sun had risen or not. A white fog was still clinging to the tops of the trees. I saw the Devotee walking through the blurred dawn, like a mist-wraith of the morning twilight. She was singing her chant to God, and sounding her cymbals.

The thick haze lifted at last; and the sun, like the kindly grandsire of the village, took his seat amid all the work that was going on in home and field.

When I had just settled down at my writing-table, to appease the hungry appetite of my editor in Calcutta, there came a sound of footsteps on the stair, and the Devotee, humming a tune to herself, entered, and bowed before me. I lifted my head from my papers.

She said to me: "My God, yesterday I took as sacred food what was left over from your meal."

I was startled, and asked her how she could do that.

"Oh," she said, "I waited at your door in the evening, while you were at dinner, and took some food from your plate when it was carried out."

This was a surprise to me, for every one in the village knew that I had been to Europe, and had eaten with Europeans. I was a vegetarian, no doubt, but the sanctity of my cook would not bear investigation, and the orthodox regarded my food as polluted.

The Devotee, noticing my sign of surprise, said: "My God, why should I come to you at all, if I could not take your food?"

I asked her what her own caste people would say. She told me she had already spread the news far and wide all over the village. The caste people had shaken their heads, but agreed that she must go her own way.

I found out that the Devotee came from a good family in the country, and that her mother was well to-do, and desired to keep her daughter. But she preferred to be a mendicant. I asked her how she made her living. She told me that her followers had given her a piece of land, and that she begged her food from door to door. She said to me: "The food which I get by begging is divine."

After I had thought over what she said, I understood her meaning. When we get our food precariously as alms, we remember God the giver. But when we receive our food regularly at home, as a matter of course, we are apt to regard it as ours by right.

I had a great desire to ask her about her husband. But as she never mentioned him even indirectly, I did not question her.

I found out very soon that the Devotee had no respect at all for that part of the village where the people of the higher castes lived.

"They never give," she said, "a single farthing to God's service; and yet they have the largest share of God's glebe. But the poor worship and starve."

I asked her why she did not go and live among these godless people, and help them towards a better life. "That," I said with some unction, "would be the highest form of divine worship."

I had heard sermons of this kind from time to time, and I am rather fond of copying them myself for the public benefit, when the chance comes.

But the Devotee was not at all impressed. She raised her big round eyes, and looked straight into mine, and said:

"You mean to say that because God is with the sinners, therefore when

you do them any service you do it to God? Is that so?"

"Yes," I replied, "that is my meaning."

"Of course," she answered almost impatiently, "of course, God is with them: otherwise, how could they go on living at all? But what is that to me? My God is not there. My God cannot be worshipped among them; because I do not find Him there. I seek Him where I can find Him."

As she spoke, she made obeisance to me. What she meant to say was really this. A mere doctrine of God's omnipresence does not help us. That God is all-pervading,—this truth may be a mere intangible abstraction, and therefore unreal to ourselves. Where I can see Him, there is His reality in my soul.

I need not explain that all the while she showered her devotion on me she did it to me not as an individual. I was simply a vehicle of her divine worship. It was not for me either to receive it or to refuse it: for it was not mine, but God's.

When the Devotee came again, she found me once more engaged with my books and papers.

"What have you been doing," she said, with evident vexation, "that my God should make you undertake such drudgery? Whenever I come, I find you reading and writing."

"God keeps his useless people busy," I answered; "otherwise they would be bound to get into mischief. They have to do all the least necessary things in life. It keeps them out of trouble."

The Devotee told me that she could not bear the encumbrances, with which, day by day, I was surrounded. If she wanted to see me, she was not allowed by the servants to come straight upstairs. If she wanted to touch my feet in worship, there were my socks always in the way. And when she wanted to have a simple talk with me, she found my mind lost in a wilderness of letters.

This time, before she left me, she folded her hands, and said: "My God! I felt your feet in my breast this morning. Oh, how cool! And they were bare, not covered. I held them upon my head for a long time in worship. That filled my very being. Then, after that, pray what was the use of my coming to you yourself? Why did I come? My Lord, tell me truly,—wasn't it a mere infatuation?"

There were some flowers in my vase on the table. While she was there, the gardener brought some new flowers to put in their place. The Devotee saw him changing them.

"Is that all?" she exclaimed. "Have you done with the flowers? Then give them to me."

She held the flowers tenderly in the cup of her hands, and began to gaze at them with bent head. After a few moments' silence she raised her head again, and said to me: "You never look at these flowers; therefore they become stale to you. If you would only look into them, then your reading and writing would go to the winds."

She tied the flowers together in the end of her robe, and placed them,

in an attitude of worship, on the top of her head, saying reverently:
"Let me carry my God with me."

While she did this, I felt that flowers in our rooms do not receive their due meed of loving care at our hands. When we stick them in vases, they are more like a row of naughty schoolboys standing on a form to be punished.

The Devotee came again the same evening, and sat by my feet on the terrace of the roof.

"I gave away those flowers," she said, "as I went from house to house this morning, singing God's name. Beni, the head man of our village, laughed at me for my devotion, and said: 'Why do you waste all this devotion on Him? Don't you know He is reviled up and down the countryside?' Is that true, my God? Is it true that they are hard upon you?"

For a moment I shrank into myself. It was a shock to find that the stains of printers' ink could reach so far.

The Devotee went on: "Beni imagined that he could blow out the flame of my devotion at one breath! But this is no mere tiny flame: it is a burning fire. Why do they abuse you, my God?"

I said: "Because I deserved it. I suppose in my greed I was loitering about to steal people's hearts in secret."

The Devotee said: "Now you see for yourself how little their hearts are worth. They are full of poison, and this will cure you of your greed."

"When a man," I answered, "has greed in his heart, he is always on the verge of being beaten. The greed itself supplies his enemies with poison."

"Our merciful God," she replied, "beats us with His own hand, and drives away all the poison. He who endures God's beating to the end is saved."

II.

That evening the Devotee told me the story of her life. The stars of evening rose and set behind the trees, as she went on to the end of her tale.

"My husband is very simple. Some people think that he is a simpleton; but I know that those who understand simply, understand truly. In business and household management he was able to hold his own. Because his needs were small, and his wants few, he could manage carefully on what we had. He would never meddle in other matters, nor try to understand them.

"Both my husband's parents died before we had been married long, and we were left alone. But my husband always needed some one to be over him. I am ashamed to confess that he had a sort of reverence for me, and looked upon me as his superior. But I am sure that he could understand things better than I, though I had greater powers of talking.

"Of all the people in the world he held his Guru Thakur (spiritual master) in the highest veneration. Indeed it was not veneration merely

but love; and such love as his is rare.

"Guru Thakur was younger than my husband. Oh! how beautiful he was!

"My husband had played games with him when he was a boy; and from that time forward he had dedicated his heart and soul to this friend of his early days. Thakur knew how simple my husband was, and used to tease him mercilessly.

"He and his comrades would play jokes upon him for their own amusement; but he would bear them all with long suffering.

"When I married into this family, Guru Thakur was studying at Benares. My husband used to pay all his expenses. I was eighteen years old when he returned home to our village.

"At the age of fifteen I had my child. I was so young I did not know how to take care of him. I was fond of gossip, and liked to be with my village friends for hours together. I used to get quite cross with my boy when I was compelled to stay at home and nurse him. Alas! my child-God came into my life, but His playthings were not ready for Him. He came to the mother's heart, but the mother's heart lagged behind. He left me in anger; and ever since I have been searching for Him up and down the world.

"The boy was the joy of his father's life. My careless neglect used to pain my husband. But his was a mute soul. He has never been able to give expression to his pain.

"The wonderful thing was this, that in spite of my neglect the child used to love me more than any one else. He seemed to have the dread that I would one day go away and leave him. So even when I was with him, he would watch me with a restless look in his eyes. He had me very little to himself, and therefore his desire to be with me was always painfully eager. When I went each day to the river, he used to fret and stretch out his little arms to be taken with me. But the bathing ghat was my place for meeting my friends, and I did not care to burden myself with the child.

"It was an early morning in August. Fold after fold of grey clouds had wrapped the mid-day round with a wet clinging robe. I asked the maid to take care of the boy, while I went down to the river. The child cried after me as I went away.

"There was no one there at the bathing ghat when I arrived. As a swimmer, I was the best among all the village women. The river was quite full with the rains. I swam out into the middle of the stream some distance from the shore.

"Then I heard a cry from the bank, 'Mother!' I turned my head and saw my boy coming down the steps, calling me as he came. I shouted to him to stop, but he went on, laughing and calling. My feet and hands became cramped with fear. I shut my eyes, afraid to see. When I opened them, there, at the slippery stairs, my boy's ripple of laughter had disappeared for ever.

"I got back to the shore. I raised him from the water. I took him in my arms, my boy, my darling, who had begged so often in vain for me to take him. I took him now, but he no more looked in my eyes and called

'Mother.'

"My child-God had come. I had ever neglected Him. I had ever made Him cry. And now all that neglect began to beat against my own heart, blow upon blow, blow upon blow. When my boy was with me, I had left him alone. I had refused to take him with me. And now, when he is dead, his memory clings to me and never leaves me.

"God alone knows all that my husband suffered. If he had only punished me for my sin, it would have been better for us both. But he knew only how to endure in silence, not how to speak.

"When I was almost mad with grief, Guru Thakur came back. In earlier days, the relation between him and my husband had been that of boyish friendship. Now, my husband's reverence for his sanctity and learning was unbounded. He could hardly speak in his presence, his awe of him was so great.

"My husband asked his Guru to try to give me some consolation. Guru Thakur began to read and explain to me the scriptures. But I do not think they had much effect on my mind. All their value for me lay in the voice that uttered them. God makes the draught of divine life deepest in the heart for man to drink, through the human voice. He has no better vessel in His hand than that; and He Himself drinks His divine draught out of the same vessel.

"My husband's love and veneration for his Guru filled our house, as incense fills a temple shrine. I showed that veneration, and had peace. I saw my God in the form of that Guru. He used to come to take his meal at our house every morning. The first thought that would come to my mind on waking from sleep was that of his food as a sacred gift from God. When I prepared the things for his meal, my fingers would sing for joy.

"When my husband saw my devotion to his Guru, his respect for me greatly increased. He noticed his Guru's eager desire to explain the scriptures to me. He used to think that he could never expect to earn any regard from his Guru himself, on account of his stupidity; but his wife had made up for it.

"Thus another five years went by happily, and my whole life would have passed like that; but beneath the surface some stealing was going on somewhere in secret. I could not detect it; but it was detected by the God of my heart. Then came a day when, in a moment our whole life was turned upside down.

"It was a morning in midsummer. I was returning home from bathing, my clothes all wet, down a shady lane. At the bend of the road, under the mango tree, I met my Guru Thakur. He had his towel on his shoulder and was repeating some Sanskrit verses as he was going to take his bath. With my wet clothes clinging all about me I was ashamed to meet him. I tried to pass by quickly, and avoid being seen. He called me by my name.

"I stopped, lowering my eyes, shrinking into myself. He fixed his gaze upon me, and said: 'How beautiful is your body!'

"All the universe of birds seemed to break into song in the branches overhead. All the bushes in the lane seemed ablaze with flowers. It was as though the earth and sky and everything had become a riot of intoxicating joy.

"I cannot tell how I got home. I only remember that I rushed into the room where we worship God. But the room seemed empty. Only before my eyes those same gold spangles of light were dancing which had quivered in front of me in that shady lane on my way back from the river.

"Guru Thakur came to take his food that day, and asked my husband where I had gone. He searched for me, but could not find me anywhere.

"Ah! I have not the same earth now any longer. The same sunlight is not mine. I called on my God in my dismay, and He kept His face turned away from me.

"The day passed, I know not how. That night I had to meet my husband. But the night is dark and silent. It is the time when my husband's mind comes out shining, like stars at twilight. I had heard him speak things in the dark, and I had been surprised to find how deeply he understood.

"Sometimes I am late in the evening in going to rest on account of household work. My husband waits for me, seated on the floor, without going to bed. Our talk at such times had often begun with something about our Guru.

"That night, when it was past midnight, I came to my room, and found my husband sleeping on the floor. Without disturbing him I lay down on the ground at his feet, my head towards him. Once he stretched his feet, while sleeping, and struck me on the breast. That was his last bequest.

"Next morning, when my husband woke up from his sleep, I was already sitting by him. Outside the window, over the thick foliage of the jack-fruit tree, appeared the first pale red of the dawn at the fringe of the night. It was so early that the crows had not yet begun to call.

"I bowed, and touched my husband's feet with my forehead. He sat up, starting as if waking from a dream, and looked at my face in amazement. I said:

"'I have made up my mind. I must leave the world. I cannot belong to you any longer. I must leave your home.'

"Perhaps my husband thought that he was still dreaming. He said not a word.

"'Ah! do hear me!' I pleaded with infinite pain. 'Do hear me and understand! You must marry another wife. I must take my leave.'

"My husband said: 'What is all this wild, mad talk? Who advises you to leave the world?'

"I said: 'My Guru Thakur.'

"My husband looked bewildered. 'Guru Thakur!' he cried. 'When did he give you this advice?'

"'In the morning,' I answered, 'yesterday, when I met him on my way back from the river.'

"His voice trembled a little. He turned, and looked in my face, and asked me: 'Why did he give you such a behest?'

"I do not know,' I answered. 'Ask him! He will tell you himself, if he can.'

"My husband said: 'It is possible to leave the world, even when continuing to live in it. You need not leave my home. I will speak to my Guru about it.'

"Your Guru,' I said, 'may accept your petition; but my heart will never give its consent. I must leave your home. From henceforth, the world is no more to me.'

"My husband remained silent, and we sat there on the floor in the dark. When it was light, he said to me: 'Let us both come to him.'

"I folded my hands and said: 'I shall never meet him again.'

"He looked into my face. I lowered my eyes. He said no more. I knew that, somehow, he had seen into my mind, and understood what was there. In this world of mine, there were only two who loved me best--my boy and my husband. That love was my God, and therefore it could brook no falsehood. One of these two left me, and I left the other. Now I must have truth, and truth alone."

She touched the ground at my feet, rose and bowed to me, and departed.

A Ladies' Man

by Robert Carr, from *In a Steamer Chair And Other Stories*
EBook #9309

"Jest w'en we guess we've covered the trail
So's no one can't foller, w'y then we fail
W'en we feel safe hid. Nemesis, the cuss,
Waltzes up with nary a warnin' nor fuss.
Grins quiet like, and says, 'How d'y do,
So glad we've met, I'm a-lookin' fer you'"

I do not wish to particularise any of the steamers on which the incidents given in this book occurred, so the boat of which I now write I shall call *The Tub*. This does not sound very flattering to the steamer, but I must say *The Tub* was a comfortable old boat, as everybody will testify who has ever taken a voyage in her. I know a very rich man who can well afford to take the best room in the best steamer if he wants to, but his preference always is for a slow boat like *The Tub*. He says that if you are not in a hurry, a slow boat is preferable to one of the new fast liners, because you have more individuality there, you get more attention, the officers are flattered by your preference for their ship, and you are not merely one of a great mob of passengers as in a crowded fast liner. The officers on a popular big and swift boat are prone to be a trifle snobbish. This is especially the case on the particular liner which for the moment stands at the top--a steamer that has broken the record, and is considered the best boat in the Atlantic service for the time being. If you get a word from the captain of such a boat you may consider yourself a peculiarly honoured individual, and even the purser is apt to answer you very shortly, and make you feel you are but a worm of the dust, even though you have paid a very large price for your state-room. On *The Tub* there was nothing of this. The officers were genial good fellows who admitted their boat was not the fastest on the Atlantic, although at one time she had been; but if *The Tub* never broke the record, on the other hand, she never broke a shaft, and so things were evened up. She wallowed her way across the Atlantic in a leisurely manner, and there was no feverish anxiety among the passengers when they reached Queenstown, to find whether the rival boat had got in ahead of us or not.

Everybody on board *The Tub* knew that any vessel which started from New York the same day would reach Queenstown before us. In fact, a good smart sailing vessel, with a fair wind, might have made it lively for us in an ocean race. *The Tub* was a broad slow boat, whose great speciality was freight, and her very broadness, which kept her from being a racer, even if her engines had had the power, made her particularly comfortable in a storm. She rolled but little; and as the state-rooms were large and airy, every passenger on board *The Tub* was sure of a reasonably pleasant voyage.

It was always amusing to hear the reasons each of the passengers gave for being on board *The Tub*. A fast and splendid liner of an opposition company left New York the next day, and many of our passengers explained to me they had come to New York with the intention of going by that boat, but they found all the rooms taken, that is, all the desirable rooms. Of coarse they might have had a room down on the third deck; but they were accustomed in travelling to have the best rooms, and if they couldn't be had, why it didn't much matter what was given them, so that

was the reason they took passage on _The Tub_. Others were on the boat because they remembered the time when she was one of the fastest on the ocean, and they didn't like changing ships. Others again were particular friends of the captain, and he would have been annoyed if they had taken any other steamer. Everybody had some particularly valid reason for choosing _The Tub_, that is, every reason except economy, for it was well known that _The Tub_ was one of the cheapest boats crossing the ocean. For my own part I crossed on her, because the purser was a particular friend of mine, and knew how to amalgamate fluids and different solid substances in a manner that produced a very palatable refreshment. He has himself deserted _The Tub_ long ago, and is now purser on one of the new boats of the same line.

When the gong rang for the first meal on board _The Tub_ after leaving New York, we filed down from the smoking-room to the great saloon to take our places at the table. There were never enough passengers on board _The Tub_ to cause a great rush for places at the table; but on this particular occasion, when we reached the foot of the stairway, two or three of us stood for a moment both appalled and entranced. Sitting at the captain's right hand was a somewhat sour and unattractive elderly woman, who was talking to that smiling and urbane official. Down the long table from where she sat, in the next fifteen seats were fifteen young and pretty girls, most of them looking smilingly and expectantly toward the stairway down which we were descending. The elderly woman paused for a moment in her conversation with the captain, glanced along the line of beauty, said sharply, 'Girls!' and instantly every face was turned demurely toward the plate that was in front of it, and then we, who had hesitated for a moment on the stairway, at once made a break, not for our seats at the table, but for the purser.

"It's all right, gentlemen," said that charming man, before we could speak; "it's all right. I've arranged your places down the table on the opposite side. You don't need to say a word, and those of you who want to change from the small tables to the large one, will find your names on the long table as well as at the small tables, where you have already chosen your places. So, you see, I knew just how you wished things arranged; but," he continued, lowering his voice, "boys, there's a dragon in charge. I know her. She has crossed with us two or three times. She wanted me to arrange it so that fifteen ladies should sit opposite her fifteen girls; but, of course, we couldn't do that, because there aren't fifteen other ladies on board, and there had to be one or two ladies placed next the girls at the foot of the table, so that no girl should have a young man sitting beside her. I have done the best I could, gentlemen, and, if you want the seats rearranged, I think we can manage it for you. Individual preferences may crop up, you know." And the purser smiled gently, for he had crossed the ocean very, very often.

We all took our places, sternly scrutinised by the lady, whom the purser had flatteringly termed the "dragon." She evidently didn't think very much of us as a crowd, and I am sure in my own heart I cannot blame her. We were principally students going over to German colleges on the cheap, some commercial travellers, and a crowd generally who could not afford to take a better boat, although we had all just missed the fast liner that had left a few days before, or had for some reason not succeeded in securing a berth on the fast boat, which was to leave the day after.

If any of the fifteen young ladies were aware of our presence, they did not show it by glancing toward us. They seemed to confine their conversation to whispers among themselves, and now and then a little

suppressed giggle arose from one part of the line or the other, upon which the "dragon" looked along the row, and said severely, "Girls!" whereupon everything was quiet again, although some independent young lady generally broke the silence by another giggle just at the time the stillness was becoming most impressive.

After dinner, in the smoking-room, there was a great deal of discussion about the fifteen pretty girls and about the "dragon." As the officers on board _The Tub_ were gentlemen whom an ordinary person might speak to, a delegation of one was deputed to go to the purser's room and find out all that could be learned in relation to the young and lovely passengers.

The purser said that the dragon's name was Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling, with a hyphen. The hyphen was a very important part of the name, and Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling always insisted upon it. Any one who ignored that hyphen speedily fell from the good graces of Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling. I regret to say, however, in spite of the hyphen, the lady was very generally known as the "dragon" during that voyage. The purser told us further, that Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling was in the habit of coming over once a year with a party of girls whom she trotted around Europe. The idea was that they learnt a great deal of geography, a good deal of French and German, and received in a general way a polish which Europe is supposed to give.

The circular which Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling issued was shown to me once by one of the girls, and it represented that all travelling was first-class, that nothing but the very best accommodations on steamers and in hotels were provided, and on account of Mrs. S. Y.'s intimate knowledge of Europe, and the different languages spoken there, she managed the excursion in a way which any one else would find impossible to emulate, and the advantages accruing from such a trip could not be obtained in any other manner without a very much larger expenditure of money. The girls had the advantage of motherly care during all the time they were abroad, and as the party was strictly limited in number, and the greatest care taken to select members only from the very best families in America, Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling was certain that all her patrons would realise that this was an opportunity of a lifetime, etc., etc.

Even if _The Tub_ were not the finest boat on the Atlantic, she certainly belonged to one of the best lines, and as the circular mentioned the line and not the particular vessel on which the excursion was to go, the whole thing had a very high-class appearance.

The first morning out, shortly after breakfast, the "dragon" and her girls appeared on deck. The girls walked two and two together, and kept their eyes pretty much on the planks beneath them. The fifteenth girl walked with the "dragon," and thus the eight pairs paced slowly up and down the deck under the "dragon's" eye. When this morning promenade was over the young ladies were marshalled into the ladies' saloon, where no masculine foot was allowed to tread. Shortly before lunch an indignation meeting was held in the smoking-room. Stewart Montague, a commercial traveller from Milwaukee, said that he had crossed the ocean many times, but had never seen such a state of things before. This young ladies' seminary business (he alluded to the two and two walk along the deck) ought not to be permitted on any well regulated ship. Here were a number of young ladies, ranging in age from eighteen upwards, and there lay ahead of us a long and possibly dreary voyage, yet the "dragon"

evidently expected that not one of the young ladies was to be allowed to speak to one of the young gentlemen on board, much less walk the deck with him. Now, for his part, said Stewart Montague, he was going to take off his hat the next morning to the young lady who sat opposite him at the dinner-table and boldly ask her to walk the deck with him. If the "dragon" interfered, he proposed that we all mutiny, seize the vessel, put the captain in irons, imprison the "dragon" in the hold, and then take to pirating on the high seas. One of the others pointed out to him an objection to this plan, claiming that _The Tub_ could not overtake anything but a sailing-vessel, while even that was doubtful. Montague explained that the mutiny was only to be resorted to as a last desperate chance. He believed the officers of the boat would give us every assistance possible, and so it was only in case of everything else failing that we should seize the ship.

In a moment of temporary aberration I suggested that the "dragon" might not be, after all, such an objectionable person as she appeared, and that perhaps she could be won over by kindness. Instantly a motion was put, and carried unanimously, appointing me a committee to try the effect of kindness on the "dragon." It was further resolved that the meeting should be adjourned, and I should report progress at the next conclave.

I respectfully declined this mission. I said it was none of my affair. I didn't wish to talk to any of the fifteen girls, or even walk the deck with them. I was perfectly satisfied as I was. I saw no reason why I should sacrifice myself for the good of others. I suggested that the name of Stewart Montague be substituted for mine, and that he should face the "dragon" and report progress.

Mr. Montague said it had been my suggestion, not his, that the "dragon" might be overcome by kindness. He did not believe she could, but he was quite willing to suspend hostilities until my plan had been tried and the result reported to the meeting. It was only when they brought in a motion to expel me from the smoking-room that I succumbed to the pressure. The voyage was just beginning, and what is a voyage to a smoker who dare not set foot in the smoking-room?

I do not care to dwell on the painful interview I had with the "dragon." I put my foot in it at the very first by pretending that I thought she came from New York, whereas she had really come from Boston. To take a New York person for a Bostonian is flattery, but to reverse the order of things, especially with a woman of the uncertain temper of Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling, was really a deadly insult, and I fear this helped to shipwreck my mission, although I presume it would have been shipwrecked in any case. Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling gave me to understand that if there was one thing more than another she excelled in it was the reading of character. She knew at a glance whether a man could be trusted or not; most men were not, I gathered from her conversation. It seems she had taken a great many voyages across the Atlantic, and never in the whole course of her experience had she seen such an objectionable body of young men as on this present occasion. She accused me of being a married man, and I surmised that there were other iniquities of which she strongly suspected me.

The mission was not a success, and I reported at the adjourned meeting accordingly.

Mr. Stewart Montague gave it as his opinion that the mission was hopeless from the first, and in this I quite agreed with him. He said he would try his plan at dinner, but what it was he refused to state. We asked if he would report on the success or failure, and he answered that we would all see whether it was a success or failure for ourselves. So there was a good deal of interest centring around the meal, an interest not altogether called forth by the pangs of hunger.

Dinner had hardly commenced when Mr. Stewart Montague leaned over the table and said, in quite an audible voice, to the young lady opposite him, "I understand you have never been over the ocean before?"

The young lady looked just a trifle frightened, blushed very prettily, and answered in a low voice that she had not.

Then he said, "I envy you the first impressions you will have of Europe. It is a charming country. Where do you go after leaving England?"

"We are going across to Paris first," she replied, still in a low voice.

Most of us, however, were looking at the "dragon." That lady sat bolt upright in her chair as if she could not believe her ears. Then she said, in an acid voice, "Miss Fleming."

"Yes, Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling," answered that young lady.

"Will you oblige me by coming here for a moment?"

Miss Fleming slowly revolved in her circular chair, then rose and walked up to the head of the table.

"Miss Strong," said the "dragon" calmly, to the young lady who sat beside her, "will you oblige me by taking Miss Fleming's place at the centre of the table?"

Miss Strong rose and took Miss Fleming's place.

"Sit down beside me, please?" said the "dragon" to Miss Fleming; and that unfortunate young woman, now as red as a rose, sat down beside the "dragon."

Stewart Montague bit his lip. The rest of us said nothing, and appeared not to notice what had occurred. Conversation went on among ourselves. The incident seemed ended; but, when the fish was brought, and placed before Miss Fleming, she did not touch it. Her eyes were still upon the table. Then, apparently unable to struggle any longer with her emotions, she rose gracefully, and, bowing to the captain, said, "Excuse me, please." She walked down the long saloon with a firm step, and disappeared. The "dragon" tried to resume conversation with the captain as if nothing had happened; but that official answered only in monosyllables, and a gloom seemed to have settled down upon the dinner party.

Very soon the captain rose and excused himself. There was something to attend to on deck, he said, and he left us.

As soon as we had reassembled in the smoking-room, and the steward had brought in our cups of black coffee, Stewart Montague arose and said, "Gentlemen, I know just what you are going to say to me. It _was_

brutal. Of course I didn't think the 'dragon' would do such a thing. My plan was a complete failure. I expected that conversation would take place across the table all along the line, if I broke the ice."

Whatever opinions were held, none found expression, and that evening in the smoking-room was as gloomy as the hour at the dinner-table.

Towards the shank of the evening a gentleman, who had never been in the smoking-room before, entered very quietly. We recognised him as the man who sat to the left of the captain opposite the "dragon." He was a man of middle age and of somewhat severe aspect. He spoke with deliberation when he did speak, and evidently, weighed his words. All we knew of him was that the chair beside his at meal-times had been empty since the voyage began, and it was said that his wife took her meals in her state-room. She had appeared once on deck with him, very closely veiled, and hung upon his arm in a way that showed she was not standing the voyage very well, pleasant as it had been.

"Gentlemen," began the man suavely, "I would like to say a few words to you if I were certain that my remarks would be taken in the spirit in which they are given, and that you would not think me intrusive or impertinent."

"Go ahead," said Montague, gloomily, who evidently felt a premonition of coming trouble.

The serious individual waited until the steward had left the room, then he closed the door. "Gentlemen," he continued, "I will not recur to the painful incident which happened at the dinner-table to-night further than by asking you, as honourable men, to think of Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling's position of great responsibility. She stands in the place of a mother to a number of young ladies who, for the first time in their lives, have left their homes."

"Lord pity them," said somebody, who was sitting in the corner.

The gentleman paid no attention to the remark.

"Now what I wish to ask of you is that you will not make Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling's position any harder by futile endeavours to form the acquaintance of the young ladies."

At this point Stewart Montague broke out. "Who the devil are you, sir, and who gave you the right to interfere?"

"As to who I am," said the gentleman, quietly, "my name is Kensington, and--"

"West or South?" asked the man in the corner.

At this there was a titter of laughter.

"My name is Kensington," repeated the gentleman, "and I have been asked by Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling to interfere, which I do very reluctantly. As I said at the beginning, I hope you will not think my interference is impertinent. I only do so at the earnest request of the lady I have mentioned, because I am a family man myself, and I understand and sympathise with the lady in the responsibility which she has assumed."

"It seems to me," said the man in the corner, "that if the 'dragon' has assumed responsibilities and they have not been thrust upon her, which I understand they have not, then she must take the responsibility of the responsibilities which she has assumed. Do I make myself clear?"

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Kensington, "it is very painful for me to speak with you upon this subject. I feel that what I have so clumsily expressed may not be correctly understood; but I appeal to your honour as gentlemen, and I am sure I will not appeal in vain when I ask you not to make further effort towards the acquaintance of the young ladies, because all that you can succeed in doing will be to render their voyage unpleasant to themselves, and interrupt, if not seriously endanger, the good feeling which I understand has always existed between Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling and her _protégées_."

"All right," said the man in the corner. "Have a drink, Mr. Kensington?"

"Thank you, I never drink," answered Mr. Kensington.

"Have a smoke, then?"

"I do not smoke either, thank you all the same for your offer. I hope, gentlemen, you will forgive my intrusion on you this evening. Good night."

"Impudent puppy," said Stewart Montague, as he closed the door behind him.

But in this we did not agree with him, not even the man in the corner.

"He is perfectly right," said that individual, "and I believe that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. It will only make trouble, and I for one am going to give up the hunt."

So, from that time forward, the smoking-room collectively made no effort towards the acquaintance of the young ladies. The ladies' seminary walk, as it was called, took place every morning punctually, and sometimes Mr. Kensington accompanied the walkers. Nevertheless, individual friendships, in spite of everything that either Mr. Kensington or the "dragon" could do, sprang up between some of the young men and some of the girls, but the "dragon" had an invaluable ally in Mr. Kensington. The moment any of the young ladies began walking with any of the young gentlemen on deck, or the moment they seated themselves in steamer chairs together, the urbane, always polite Mr. Kensington appeared on the scene and said, "Miss So-and-So, Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling would like to speak with you."

Then the young lady would go with Mr. Kensington, while the young gentleman was apt to use strong language and gnash his teeth.

Mr. Kensington seemed lynx-eyed. There was no escaping him. Many in the smoking-room no doubt would have liked to have picked a flaw in his character if they could. One even spoke of the old chestnut about a man who had no small vices being certain to have some very large ones; but even the speakers themselves did not believe this, and any one could see at a glance that Mr. Kensington was a man of sterling character. Some hinted that his wife was the victim of his cruelty, and kept her state-room only because she knew that he was so fond of the "dragon's" company, and possibly that of some of the young ladies as well. But

this grotesque sentiment did not pass current even in the smoking-room. Nevertheless, although he was evidently so good a man, he was certainly the most unpopular individual on board _The Tub_. The hatred that Stewart Montague felt for him ever since that episode in the smoking-room was almost grotesque.

Montague had somehow managed to get a contrite note of apology and distress to Miss Fleming, and several times the alert Mr. Kensington had caught them together, and asked Miss Fleming with the utmost respect to come down and see Mrs. Scrivener-Yapling.

All in all the "dragon" did not have a very easy time of it. She fussed around like any other old hen who had in charge a brood of ducks.

Once I thought there was going to be a row between Montague and Kensington. He met that gentleman in a secluded part of the deck, and, going up to him, said--

"You old wife deserter, why can't you attend to your own affairs?"

Kensington turned deadly pale at this insult, and his fists clinched--

"What do you mean?" he said huskily.

"I mean what I say. Why don't you take your own wife walking on the deck, and leave the young ladies alone. It's none of your business with whom they walk."

Kensington seemed about to reply; but he thought better of it, turned on his heel, and left Montague standing there.

The old _Tub_ worried her way across the ocean, and reached the bar at Liverpool just in time to be too late to cross it that night. Word was passed along that a tender would come out from Liverpool for us, which was not a very cheering prospect, as we would have two hours' sail at least in what was practically an open boat.

Finally the tender came alongside, and the baggage was dumped down upon it. All of us gathered together ready to leave _The Tub_. Mr. Kensington, with his closely-veiled wife hanging on his arm, was receiving the thanks and congratulations of the "dragon." The fifteen girls were all around her. Before any one started down the sloping gangway plank, however, two policemen, accompanied by a woman, hurried up on board _The Tub_.

"Now, madam," said the policeman, "is he here?"

We saw that trouble was coming, and everybody looked at everybody else.

"Is he here?" cried the woman excitedly; "there he stands, the villain. Oh, you villain, you scoundrel, you _mean_ rascal, to leave me, as you thought, penniless in New York, and desert your own wife and family for that--that creature!" We all looked at Kensington, and his face was greenish-pale. The heavily veiled woman shrunk behind him and the policeman tried to make the true wife keep quiet.

"Is your name Broughton?"

Kensington did not answer. His eyes were riveted on his wife. "In the name of God," he cried aghast, "how did _you_ come here?"

"How did I come here," she shrieked. "Oh, you thought you slipped away nicely, didn't you? But you forgot that the _Clipper_ left the next day, and I've been here two days waiting for you. You little thought when you deserted me and my children in New York that we would be here to confront you at Liverpool."

"Come, come," said the policeman, "there's no use of this. I am afraid you will have to come with us, sir."

They took him in charge, and the irate wife then turned like a tigress on the heavily veiled woman who was with him.

"No wonder you are ashamed to show your face," she cried.

"Come, come," said the policeman, "come, come." And they managed to induce her to say no more.

"Madam," said young Montague to the speechless 'dragon,' "I want to ask your permission to allow me to carry Miss Fleming's hand-baggage ashore."

"How dare you speak to me, sir?" she answered.

"Because," he said, in a low voice, "I thought perhaps you wouldn't like an account of this affair to go to the Boston newspapers. I'm a newspaper man, you see," he added, with unblushing mendacity. Then, turning to Miss Fleming, he said, "Won't you allow me to carry this for you?"

Miss Fleming surrendered the natty little handbag she had with her, and smiled. The "dragon" made no objection.

The Captured Dream

by Octave Thanet, from *Prairie Gold*
EBook #39957

Somers rode slowly over the low Iowa hills, fitting an air in his mind to Andrew Lang's dainty verses. Presently, being quite alone on the country road, he began to sing:

"In dreams doth he behold her,
Still fair and kind and young."

The gentle strain of melancholy and baffled desire faded into silence, but the young man's thoughts pursued it. A memory of his own that sometimes stung him, sometimes plaintively caressed him, stirred in his heart. "I am afraid you hit it, Andy," he muttered, "and I should have found it only a dream had I won."

At thirty Somers imagined himself mighty cynical. He consorted with daring critics, and believed the worst both of art and letters. He was making campaign cartoons for a daily journal instead of painting the picture of the future; the panic of '93 had stripped him of his little fortune, and his sweetheart had refused to marry him. Therefore he said incessantly in the language of Job, "I do well to be angry."

The rubber tires revolved more slowly as his eyes turned from the wayside to the smiling hills. The corn ears were sheathed in silvery yellow, but the afternoon sun jewelled the green pastures, fresh as in May, for rain had fallen in the morning, and maples, oaks and elms blended exquisite gradations of color and shade here and there among the open fields. Long rows of poplars recalled France to Somers and he sighed. "These houses are all comfortable and all ugly," thought the artist. "I never saw anything less picturesque. The life hasn't even the dismal interest of poverty and revolt, for they are all beastly prosperous; and one of the farmers has offered me a hundred dollars and my expenses to come here and make a pastel of his wife. And I have taken the offer because I want to pay my board bill and buy a second-hand bicycle. The chances are he is after something like a colored photograph, something slick and smooth, and every hair painted--Oh, Lord! But I have to have the money; and I won't sign the cursed thing. What does he want it for though? I wonder, did he ever know love's dream? Dream? It's all a dream--a mirage of the senses or the fancy. Confound it, why need I be harking back to it? I must be near his house. House near the corner, they said, where the roads cross. Ugh! How it jumps at the eyes."

The house before him was yellow with pea-green blinds; the great barns were Indian red; the yard a riot of color from blooming flowers.

Somers wheeled up to the gate and asked of the old man who was leaning upon the fence where Mr. Gates lived.

"Here," said the old man, not removing his elbows from the fence bar.

"And, may I ask, are you Mr. Gates?" said Somers.

"Yes, sir. But if you're the young man was round selling 'Mother, Home and Heaven,' and going to call again to see if we liked it, we don't

want it. My wife can't read and we're taking a Chicago paper now, and ain't got any time."

Somers smiled. "I'm not selling anything but pictures," said he, "and I believe you want me to make one for you."

"Are you Mr. Somers, F. J. S.?" cried the farmer, his face lighting in a surprising manner. "Well, I'm glad to see you, sir. My wife said you'd come this afternoon and I wouldn't believe her. I'm always caught when I don't believe my wife. Come right in. Oh, did you bring your tools with you?"

He guided Somers into the house and into a room so dark that he stumbled.

"There's the sofy; set down," said Gates, who seemed full of hospitable cheer. "I'll get a blind open. Girl's gone to the fair and Mother's setting out on the back piazza, listening to the noises on the road. She's all ready. Make yourself to home. Pastel like them pictures on the wall's what I want. My daughter done them." His tone changed on the last sentence, but Somers did not notice it; he was drinking in the details of the room to describe them afterwards to his sympathizing friends in Chicago.

"What a chamber of horrors," he thought, "and one can see he is proud of it." The carpet was soft to the foot, covered with a jungle of flowers and green leaves--the pattern of carpet which fashion leaves behind for disappointed salesmen to mark lower and lower until it shall be pushed into the ranks of shopworn bargains. The cheap paper on the wall was delicately tinted, but this boon came plainly from the designers, and not the taste of the buyer, since there was a simply terrible chair that swung by machinery, and had four brilliant hues of plush to vex the eye, besides a paroxysm of embroidery and lace to which was still attached the red ticket of the county fair. More embroidery figured on the cabinet organ and two tables, and another red ticket peeped coyly from under the ornate frame of a pastel landscape displaying every natural beauty--forest, mountain, sunlit lake, and meadow--at their bluest and greenest. There were three other pictures in the room, two very large colored photographs of a lad of twelve and of a pretty girl who might be sixteen, in a white gown with a roll of parchment in her hand tied with a blue ribbon; and the photograph of a cross of flowers.

The girl's dark, wistful, timid eyes seemed to follow the young artist as he walked about the room. They appealed to him. "Poor little girl," he thought, "to have to live here." Then he heard a dragging footfall, and there entered the mistress of the house. She was a tall woman who stooped. Her hair was gray and scanty, and so ill-arranged on the top of her head that the mournful tonsure of age showed under the false gray braid. She was thin with the gaunt thinness of years and toil, not the poetic, appealing slenderness of youth. She had attired herself for the picture in a black silken gown, sparkling with jet that tinkled as she moved; the harsh, black, bristling line at the neck defined her withered throat brutally. Yet Somers's sneer was transient. He was struck by two things--the woman was blind, and she had once worn a face like that of the pretty girl. With a sensation of pity he recalled Andrew Lang's verses; inaudibly, while she greeted him he was repeating:

"Who watches day by day
The dust of time that stains her,
The griefs that leave her gray,
The flesh that still enchains her,
Whose grace has passed away."

Her eyes were closed but she came straight toward him, holding out her hand. It was her left hand that was extended; her right closed over the top of a cane, and this added to the impression of decrepitude conveyed by her whole presence. She spoke in a gentle, monotonous, pleasant voice. "I guess this is Mr. Somers, the artist. I feel--we feel very glad to have the honor of meeting you, sir."

No one had ever felt honored to meet Somers before. He thought how much refinement and sadness were in a blind woman's face. In his most deferential manner he proffered her a chair. "I presume I am to paint you, madam?" he said.

She blushed faintly. "Ain't it ridiculous?" she apologized. "But Mr. Gates will have it. He has been at me to have somebody paint a picture of me ever since I had my photograph taken. It was a big picture and most folks said it was real good, though not flattering; but he wouldn't hang it. He took it off and I don't know what he did do to it. 'I want a real artist to paint you, Mother,' he said. I guess if Kitty had lived she'd have suited him, though she was all for landscape; never did much figures. You noticed her work in this room, ain't you--on the table and chair and organ--art needlework? Kitty could do anything. She took six prizes at the county fair; two of 'em come in after she was in her last sickness. She was so pleased that she had the picture--that's the picture right above the sofy; it's a pastel--and the tidy, I mean the art needle work--put on her bed, and she looked at them the longest while. Her paw would never let the tickets be took off." She reached forth her hand to the chair near her and felt the ticket, stroking it absently, her chin quivering a little, while her lips smiled. "Mr. Gates was thinking," she said, "that maybe you'd paint a head of me--pastel like that landscape--that's why he likes pastel so. And he was thinking if--if maybe--my eyes was jest like Kitty's when we were married--if you would put in eyes, he would be awful much obliged and be willing to pay extra if necessary. Would it be hard?"

Somers dissembled a great dismay. "Certainly not," said he, rather dryly; and he was ashamed of himself at the sensitive flutter in the old features.

"Of course I know," she said, in a different tone than she had used before, "I understand how comical it must seem to a young man to have to draw an old woman's picture; but it ain't comical to my husband. He wants it very much. He's the kindest man that ever lived, to me, caring for me all the time. He's got me that organ--me that can't play a note, and never could--just because I love to hear music, and sometimes if we have an instrument, the neighbors will come in, especially Hattie Knight, who used to know Kittie, and is a splendid performer; she comes and plays and sings. It is a comfort to me. And though I guess you young folks can't understand it, it will be a comfort to him to have a picture of me. I mistrusted you'd be thinking it comical, and I hurried to come in and speak to you, lest, not meaning anything, you might, just by chance, let fall something might hurt his feelings--like you thought it queer or some sech thing. And he thinks so much of you, and

having you here, that I couldn't bear there'd be any mistake."

"Surely it is the most natural thing in the world that he should want a portrait of you," Somers hastily interrupted.

"Yes, it is," she answered in her mild, even tones, "but it mightn't seem so to young folks. Young folks think they know all there is about loving. And it is very sweet and nice to enjoy things together; and you don't hardly seem to be in the world at all when you're courting, your feet and your head and your heart feel so light. But they don't know what it is to need each other? It's when folks suffer together that they find out what loving is. I never knew what I felt towards my husband till I lost my first baby; and I'd wake up in the night and there'd be no cradle there--and he'd comfort me. Do you see that picture under the photograph of the cross?"

"He's a pretty boy," said Somers.

"Yes, sir. He was drowned in the river. A lot of boys in playing, and one got too far, and Eddy, he swum out to help him. And he clumb up on Eddy and the man on shore didn't get there in time. He was a real good boy and liked to play home with me 'most as well as with the boys. Father was proud as he could be of him, though he wouldn't let on. That cross was what his schoolmates sent; and teacher she cried when she told me how hard Eddy was trying to win the prize to please his pa. Father and I went through that together. And we had to change all the things we used to talk of together, because Eddy was always in them; and we had to try not to let each other see how our hearts were breaking, and not shadder Kitty's life by letting her see how we missed him. Only once father broke down; it was when he give Kitty Eddy's colt." She stopped, for she could not go on.

"Don't--don't distress yourself," Somers begged lamely. His cheeks were very hot.

"It don't distress me," she answered, "only for the minnit; I'm always thinking of Eddy and Kitty too. Sometimes I think it was harder for father when his girl went than anything else. And then my blindness and my rheumatism come; and it seemed he was trying to make up to me for the daughter and the son I'd lost, and be all to once to me. He has been, too. And do you think that two old people that have grown old together, like us, and have been through losses like that--do you think they ain't drawed closer and kinder and tenderer to each other, like the Lord to his church? Why, I'm plain, and old and blind and crooked--but he don't know it. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes," said Somers, "I understand."

"And you'll please excuse me for speaking so free; it was only so father's feelings shouldn't get hurt by noticing maybe a look like you wanted to laugh."

"God knows I don't want to laugh," Somers burst in. "But I'm glad you spoke. It--it will be a better picture. Now may I ask you something? I want you to let me dress you--I mean put something about your neck, soft and white; and then I want to make two sketches of you--one, as Mr. Gates wishes, the head alone; the other of you sitting in the rustic chair outside."

"But--" she looked troubled--"it will be so expensive; and I know it will be foolish. If you'd just the same----"

"But I shouldn't; I want to do it. And it will not cost you anything. A hundred dollars will repay me well enough. I wish--I truly wish I could afford to do it all for nothing."

She gasped. "A hundred dollars! Oh, it ain't right. That was why he wouldn't buy the new buggy. And jest for a picture of me." But suddenly she flushed like a girl and smiled.

At this instant the old man, immaculate in his heavy black suit and glossy white shirt, appeared in the doorway bearing a tray.

"Father," said the old wife, "do you mean to tell me you are going to pay a hundred dollars jest for a picture of me?"

"Well, Mother, you know there's no fool like an old fool," he replied, jocosely; but when the old wife turned her sightless face toward the old husband's voice and he looked at her, Somers bowed his head.

He spent the afternoon over his sketches. Riding away in the twilight, he knew he had done better work than he had ever done before in his life, slight as its form might be; nevertheless he was not thinking of himself at all. He was trying to shape his own vague perception that the show of dainty thinking and the pomp of refinement are in truth amiable and lovely things, yet are they no more than the husks of life; not only under them, but under ungracious and sordid conditions, may be the human semblance of that "beauty most ancient, beauty most new," that the old saint found too late. He felt the elusive presence of something in love higher than his youthful dream; stronger than passion, fairer than delight. To this commonplace man and woman had come the deepest gift of life.

"A dream?" he murmured. "Yes, perhaps he has captured it."